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CHOICE

Independent information for smart consumers

Tests

WASHING MACHINES
HOME SAFES
SURROUND-SOUND SYSTEMS
CARPET STAIN REMOVERS

Rub it better: DO PAIN-RELIEF CREAMS WORK?

What's the best food for your pet?

Food labelling

READ IT AND WEEP

Louise Sylvan, CEO

'Warm and fuzzy' bad for the economy

Open a newspaper these days and it's not hard to find an attack on the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission by big-business lobby groups.

We'd worry if businesses *weren't* protesting about a regulator — it usually means there's no enforcement activity — but recent attacks on Professor Allan Fels were vicious. The reason, of course, is the review of the Trade Practices Act: opportunity for some to try and muzzle the regulator and weaken the Act.

The Consumers' Association has put in a submission arguing for a strengthened Act and the continued high profile of the ACCC chairman. Businesses are far more aware of the law and consumers of their rights than if we had a shy and retiring regulator. And it's a very cost-effective compliance and public education strategy — the publicity is free; if we had to pay for this as taxpayers, it'd cost a fortune.

The Consumers' Association submission also strongly puts the case for jail sentences for business executives engaging in hard-core collusion such as price fixing. Theft is theft: people shouldn't be protected from a jail sentence just because it's 'theft with a briefcase'.

Small businesses and consumers are largely saying the same thing to the review, but the big end of town has two key wishes: changing the ACCC process so more big mergers happen (the big banks, the big oil companies, among others) and silencing the regulator.

More mergers between already big companies is bad news for consumers — we pay higher prices because there's less competition — but it's bad news for the Australian economy as well. The warm and fuzzy term 'national champions' is being bandied about — letting big companies merge to make 'national champions' who can compete better in global markets.

But the real fact is that businesses that haven't been honed by strong competitive pressures at home will be ill-equipped to make it in the bigger world. (It's just like world-class athletes — they develop their abilities through competition, not lack of it.) And the evidence shows this too: it's strong competition law and a strong regulator that helps create companies that are world-class competitors. We all want our Australian businesses to compete well globally, but to do that they'd better learn how here.

You can find the full submission and email the review committee at www.choice.com.au/campaigns: just click on the relevant button.

Louise Sylvan, CEO, Consumers' Association

CHOICE

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PHONE us on (02) 9577 3399.
FAX us on (02) 9577 3355.
EMAIL us at ausconsumer@choice.com.au
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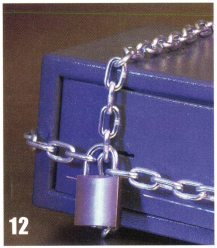
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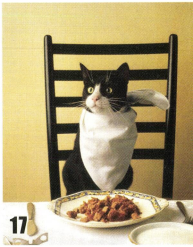
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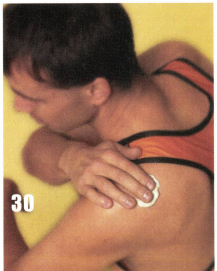
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Extinguishers that make fires worse

Have you bought a fire extinguisher in the past few years? If it's a **FIRE CAP Fire and Smoke Suppressant**, it may be dangerous to use, warn the Queensland Department of Fair Trading and the ACCC.

The 30 cm high aerosol cans are red, orange, yellow, black and white with a red plastic cap and red aerosol button. Wording on the can reads in part 'FIRE CAP ... FIRE and SMOKE SUPPRESSANT' ... 'FOR USE ON SMALL SPOT FIRES'.

If you have one of these fire extinguishers, don't use it. Discharge it onto a grassy area and then dispose of the can safely.

"Tests have shown that this fire extinguisher could intensify some types of fire, particularly oil fires," ACCC Chairman Professor Allan Fels said. "Preliminary tests conducted by the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service showed that oil fires flared if the **FIRE CAP** extinguisher was used on them."

While it appears the fire extinguisher was primarily supplied in northern Queensland over the past two-and-a-half years, possibly through door-to-door sales as part of a safety package, if you've bought one outside Queensland please inform the ACCC Infocentre on 1300 302 502.

In Australia, portable fire extinguishers are covered by a mandatory product safety standard under the Trade Practices Act. For more information on safety standards go to www.accc.gov.au, and for information and advice on fire safety products, go to www.fire.qld.gov.au.

WHAT'S THE FUSS ABOUT ACRYLAMIDE?

A couple of months ago the results of research on a cancer-causing chemical called acrylamide hit the news. The study showed it's formed in starchy foods cooked at high temperatures. Those tests were conducted in Sweden, and since then similar results have been found in tests conducted in the UK, Switzerland, US and Norway.

Foods in which acrylamide develops when they're cooked above 120°C include chips (hot and otherwise), bread and processed cereals. Other foods may also contain it, but at this stage many haven't been tested.

The World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) brought together scientific experts in a meeting at the end of June to look at the evidence, examine what can be said about the research and what information is lacking. The result wasn't surprising — more research required.

WHO and FAO are planning to establish a network for research on acrylamide in order to better understand human exposure and health effects. So far there have been no studies of the

WORLD CONSUMER SNAPSHOT

WHY GUMMY BEARS ARE GOOD FOR YOU

Sweet fanciers will be happy to hear that, according to a study reported by German *Test* magazine, the yummy gummies (known as Gummibärchen there) supply three amino acids the body can't produce but needs for growth, muscle development and the immune system, among other things. Apparently the gelatine in the sweets, derived from animal bones, contains the valuable substances, but so far there's no evidence that an extremely high intake is a good idea.

PESTS GALORE

And from *Test* also comes a report of an interesting service it provides. For 17 euro, German consumers can send in a pest and have it analysed, plus find out how to deal with it.

Test asks for dead bugs only so that they won't infest the laboratory; flies or moths can be swatted, but not squashed till unrecognisable. Insects are requested to be sent in a film container sealed with sticky tape (but not glued on).

Since starting the service in August 1999, *Test* has received nearly 1600 containers of dead insects or larvae. Great idea, but at the moment, CHOICE's resident cockroaches are pests enough for us...

THE PENAN PROBLEM

Since the early 1980s Penan people and other communities in Malaysia have requested a halt to logging of the Sarawak forests, writing petitions and risking arrest with intermittent blockades. *Utusan Konsumer* from Penang recently interviewed indigenous inhabitants of the area about the impact of logging operations.

"My breast milk dries up sometimes because I do not get enough food...[and] the fish are all gone"; "My wife died after drinking from the river"; "Upper Patah used to be so clean. Now the water looks like chocolate milk, sometimes you can even find oil spills floating downstream."

The Consumers' Association of Penang reports that, for these forest-dependent communities, accessing forest and river resources, food, housing, healthcare, education and other necessities like clean water and electricity is a struggle.

While political hot air about special task forces and funding — ongoing since 1987 — doesn't appear to have translated into action, it's good to see consumer organisations offering a voice for poor communities, as well as advocacy and safer products for wealthier ones.

ANTHONY SAWERS

relationship between acrylamide and cancer in humans, only studies on laboratory rats. The expert meeting didn't consider it had enough data yet to estimate cancer risks posed by levels of acrylamide in our diets.

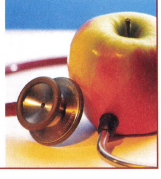
So what can you do until further research is conducted? While scientists have only just discovered the presence of this chemical, we've been eating starchy foods cooked at high temperatures for hundreds of years. Immediate further research is an excellent next step, but for now it's the same old advice: reduce the amount of fatty food you eat. There are lots of other reasons to avoid chips and biscuits. Eat a balanced diet that includes lots of fruit and veges, and until more is known, bread and low-fat cereals are still an important part of a healthy diet.

UPDATE AND CORRECTION

HEALTH INSURANCE

CHOICE, July 2002

- We published the wrong score for **GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES HEALTH FUND Hospital Cover**. The correct score is 90% (not 97%), but the policy stays a Best Buy for Best-value Top Cover in the NT, Tasmania, Victoria and WA.
- Since July 1, **MBF** no longer gives a 4% discount for autopay (such as paying by direct debit from your bank account). As most health fund members pay their policies by autopay we use the rate for it when quoting premiums. **MBF Select Hospital** — **F10** ($1000 excess) was listed as one of the cheapest premiums available in the NT; its new annual premium is $440.50. (Buying this policy won't exempt you from the Medicare surcharge.)



Paying bills online

Tired of lining up at lunchtime or writing cheques to pay your bills? While you can still pay in person or by mail, electronic payment can be a faster and sometimes cheaper alternative. Plus it's open 24 hours a day.

In Australia there are currently two online services you can use, which also collect all your billing information in one place: **POSTbillpay** (run by Australia Post at www.postbillpay.com.au) and **BPAY** (which you use through your financial institution's website).

How POSTbillpay works

- You can log onto the site as an unregistered user, enter the **Billpay** code and reference number from your bill, the amount you want to pay (by credit card) and you'll get a receipt number as proof.
- Or you can register and use your cheque or savings accounts from any financial institution in Australia. You can also opt to receive and pay bills electronically, scheduling payments for a time that suits you. For this option you need to fill in a direct debit authority form. **POSTbillpay** alerts you to your bills by email and you check and pay them onsite. Australia Post then sends the biller the funds.

How BPAY works

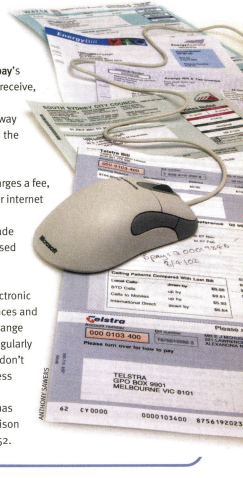
'Find your financial institution' on www.bpay.com.au shows registered institutions; also check out 'Which bills can I pay?'.

If your institution's registered, you can log on to its website to pay bills. Just enter the **BPAY** code and reference number from your bill and the amount you want to pay; you'll get a receipt number as proof.

BPAY View, which is similar to **POSTbillpay**'s service for registered users, allows you to receive, view and pay bills online. At the time of writing, only a few bills were payable this way and only the Commonwealth Bank offered the service. Check your bank's website or www.bpay.com.au for more information.

- **Costs**: Neither **POSTbillpay** nor **BPAY** charges a fee, but you'll probably incur charges from your internet service provider and financial institution.
- **Timing**: Payments aren't necessarily made instantly, as most transactions are processed during business hours.
- **Risks**: A recent incidence of **BPAY** fraud highlighted the need to take care with electronic banking: check bank statements and balances and advise your bank of any discrepancies; change internet and phone banking passwords regularly and use a different one for each account; don't give personal details over the phone, unless you've phoned your bank yourself.

Computer CHOICE, July/August 2002, has more on paying bills online and a comparison of services. To subscribe, call 1800 069 552.



ANTHONY SAWERS

Phone accessories can affect your warranty

Have you been tempted by an attractive-sounding mobile phone package with 'free accessories'? Earlier this year one of our subscribers, Andrew Soulis, signed up for a plan with Optus. On receipt of the package, however, he discovered that the accessories (a car charger, hands-free headset and leather case) weren't made by Ericsson, the manufacturer of his phone. His phone brochure advised using only 'genuine' Ericsson parts. Failure to do so would result in the phone's warranty being voided and possibly damage to the phone and impairment of its performance.

Andrew complained to Optus and asked to be sent Ericsson accessories, but Optus told him it had sold the accessories in question with many mobile phones and hadn't had any complaints. In the end the company agreed to cancel his contract and refund his money.

Andrew thinks it's a bit of a worry that these parts are supplied for use with brand-name phones, especially as their use could void the phone's warranty. If your phone is damaged due to using 'non-genuine' parts and the phone manufacturer therefore won't honour its warranty, approach the service provider that supplied the parts as part of the phone package.

Optus says, "If a non-genuine accessory is provided to a customer as part of an authorised Optus phone plan package, and the warranty is voided as a result, then we would honour the terms of the manufacturer's warranty."

Many people who buy mobile phone accessories no doubt welcome the availability of non-genuine parts — in general they're around 10–40% cheaper. And some of these parts — such as a leather case — are highly unlikely to damage the phone. So the manufacturers' warnings about use of non-genuine parts should really be limited to those that could pose a real risk of damage or loss of performance.

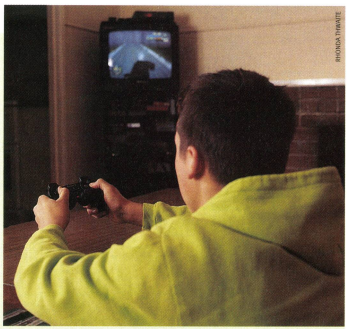
New video game risk

There've already been plenty of warnings about video games keeping kids from exercise and social contact, but recently some British doctors warned of a possible new problem. They'd treated a 15-year-old boy with a hand injury previously observed in workers using heavy machinery, particularly coal miners.

The cause of the problem, known as 'hand-arm vibration syndrome' or more colourfully as 'vibration white finger', is due to prolonged exposure to vibrations, thought to damage tissue faster than the body's normal healing process can cope with. It's only a possible new problem for video gamers because some experts have questioned this diagnosis due to lack of detailed information on the actual exposure to vibration.

Game console makers Sony (Playstation 2), Nintendo (GameCube) and Microsoft (Xbox) issue warnings with their products and recommend users to take regular breaks and stop playing if they experience any discomfort. The boy with the hand problem had been playing for up to seven hours a day quite regularly, and used a special vibration feature provided as an option with consoles — for example, it makes car racing games seem more realistic.

As computer office work showed when it took off, doing any repetitive task without adequate rest can cause injury and often long-term disability. Previously such injuries were found in older-style manual work, such as on assembly lines or in mines. The continued use of impact drills and saws in these situations first revealed the vibration injury that resulted in workers going to their doctors with hands that were swollen and white when cold, and red and painful when warm.


ISTOCK/TIM WHITE

If you're a parent of a keen gamer, this may be another reason for taking an (unappreciated) hard line about how time is divided between playing and doing other things. If you're an older gamer yourself, you know what you need to do too. Make a habit of taking a break at least every 30 minutes (Sony recommends this) and go outside, walk around, do something completely different. And if you feel any discomfort, stiffness, prolonged pain or numbness while playing, take a *long* break.

yourletters

AND LET'S CHARGE THEM INTEREST ON A FULLY PAID OFF MORTGAGE ACCOUNT
BRILLIANT IDEA!
LET'S CHARGE THEM INTEREST EVEN IF THEY HAVEN'T GOT AN ACCOUNT
THERE'S NO NEED TO GO OVER THE TOP
NIK SCOTT

Zero loan still costs

Did you know you could pay interest on a loan even if the loan had reached zero?

Even though I paid my mortgage off before the due date, I was still charged interest on the account of zero — the interest yesterday was at $112.82. I thought that interest could only accrue on money in the same way that mould grows on bath tiles — that is, no tiles means no mould. Boy, was I wrong! Apparently, interest can still be charged on a zero balance. When I asked to freeze the account, I was charged a $300 termination fee!

My telephone conversation with the bank took half an hour — to find out about the interest on the zero balance and also about the letter I had sent to close the account, which the bank had lost. While I eventually spoke to three different people, I had to listen to four different menus before I was able to speak to a human being. More than ever I'm left feeling banks are bastards.

Rosemarie Powell
Via internet

Rosemarie's bank told us that to close a mortgage account, the customer must request a final payout figure (including outstanding principal, interest, fees plus a discharge fee) which, in this case, is valid for one month, and also that the account be closed. Paying an outstanding balance doesn't automatically close an account, as some people choose to pay their balance but keep the account open.

So, although Rosemarie paid the balance shown on her last mortgage statement, there was a period of time between the statement being issued and her payment, during which interest accrued daily on the outstanding balance.

While it's reasonable to expect that a mortgage and all attached facilities will be automatically closed when the mortgage is paid off — unless you request otherwise — Rosemarie's experience shows this isn't necessarily what happens in practice. Ask for a final payout figure and get written confirmation from your bank that your loan, and your account, really are finalised when you think they are, including whether anything else, such as a linked credit account, will be affected.

Finally, it's pretty disappointing to hear that the bank lost Rosemarie's letter and she didn't receive an apology.

THUMBS UP

I much prefer writing letters praising good service and products, but when unhappy with a purchase, it's up to me to inform the company or they won't know.

I've had mostly positive responses to complaints over the years and two that stand out responded in person. After complaining to McWilliam's Wines about a difficult tap on its wine cask, I answered the door to a young man bearing a cask of McWilliam's wine.

The other was a general complaint about modern-day bread to Tip Top Bakeries. In a short time its local rep, new at the job and keen to present the company in the best light, arrived at my home with six varieties of Tip Top bread.

While it's rare to get such personalised attention, it certainly leaves you with a high regard for the companies' commitment to good customer relations.

What a pity all business doesn't realise the importance of employing the right people to deal with consumers, although it seems like common sense to me. Some haven't the faintest idea. When a reply to my letter begins: "We value our customers ..." I know I'm getting their standard line and not a considered response to my queries. It's obvious the shareholder is king and customers are second-best. But then, some don't have the courtesy or business nous to bother answering letters at all — not a good image and one that remains with me.

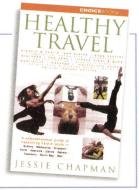
Judith Rowe
Yandina, Qld

LETTER OF THE MONTH

We want to hear from you — your experiences help our research and often let other readers know about scams and rip-offs.

To thank you for writing to us, *Your Letters* awards a prize of a CHOICE book to the 'Letter of the month'. This month's winner, Rosemarie Powell, receives *Healthy Travel*, or any other book of her choice from Consumer Bookshelf, pages 38 to 40.

We're sorry we don't have the resources to answer all your letters personally, and in the magazine we may edit them or print only an extract. See page 2 for how to reach us.



FOOD LABELS: don't believe

A food label may tell you the whole story, *if* you know what you're looking for. But sometimes it takes more than a quick glance to avoid being ripped off.

PHOTOS ANTHONY SAWERS/FOOD STYLIST LIZ MUNN

IN A NUTSHELL

Bacon and onion sauce with no bacon, *apple and strawberry mix with no strawberry, 'tropical' fruit products with non-tropical fruit, gravy that's been nowhere near meat — just some of the worst labelling examples we found, and you'd never realise without reading the small print. Read on for more surprises.*

When it comes to the weekly shopping, most of us rush from one end of the aisles to the other, making fast decisions about what we buy. But as the following raft of examples shows, a cursory glance at the label often isn't enough to get the whole story. And in some cases you could stand there all day, but without a PhD in food labelling you'd be hard-pressed to guess the implications of some of the fine print.

Welcome to the world of food marketing … read on and judge for yourself if food labels in Australia are a reliable reflection of what you think you're probably getting in a food or just agents of cynical marketing.

FRUIT FANTASY

Problems with the fruit content of foods are a recurring theme, as several of the examples in this article show, but one issue we see again and again is where the fruit that's shouted in the big print isn't quite all it seems to be when you get to the fine print. Fruits not named creep in — apple, sultanas, pear — and sometimes there's even more of these than the fruits named. Take these Banana Fruit Fingers (with more pear than banana); these Apricot Breakfree fruit bars, whose fruit consists of mostly apple and which are only 3% apricot; or these Tropical Fruity Bix Bars, which despite their claim to include "a combination of real pineapple, banana and mango fruit pieces" contain more apple than any of these other fruits.

It's not just a fruit problem. Chicken and Sweet Corn Gourmet Cup-A-Soup, for example, contains more sweet corn than chicken — so what's wrong with calling it sweet corn and chicken? Not to mention the fact that there's more potato than either.

TROPICAL? SINCE WHEN?

Tropical just refers to the 'flavour impression' of the product, not necessarily the location where its ingredients were grown. That's why these 'tropical' fruit products can be largely apple, pear or peach. And while we're on the subject — bananas are usually grown in plantations, not orchards, so it's tricky to know why Earth's Best Chunky Orchard Fruit should consist of apples, pears and bananas.

SEEING WHAT YOU EXPECT TO SEE?

Take a quick glance at these labels — peaches and mango, right? Well, no — actually peaches *in* mango (and fruit juice). The juicy mango chunks in the pics aren't in the packs. In fact you get mango puree — and not as much as there is fruit juice, either.

everything you read ...

YOU'D NEVER KNOW IF YOU DIDN'T CHECK THE FINE PRINT

These three baby foods look pretty much the same — as if they contain fruit, presumably pureed to a consistency suitable for a four- or six-month baby. But guess what? The apple and mango *is* pureed apple and mango, but the other two are largely thickened fruit juice, with pureed fruit well down the list. But babies won't know the difference, right?

NOT YOUR USUAL KETTLE OF FISH

Tuna chunks in spring water — so far, so good. But if that's what the product is, why does the ingredients list also include the — rather unexpected — vegetable broth, salt and soy?

IT'S IN THE NAME, BUT WHAT'S IN THE PACK?

These two balsamic vinegar dressings sound similar, but the one on the left has more ordinary vinegar than balsamic, while the one on the right is the opposite. Always check how much of an expensive ingredient you're getting — the new regulations coming into force at the end of this year will mean manufacturers will have to tell you the percentage of the key ingredient.

CHOICE thinks there are far too many questionable labels on our supermarket shelves. We'll be asking the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) to investigate. In 1997 it negotiated with the pet food industry to curb misleading pet food labels, so surely people food should at least get the same attention.

AUSTRALIAN ... BUT NOT IN THE FINE PRINT

These frozen raspberries are made by a company "dedicated to buying Australian fruit wherever possible". But you have to look at the bottom of the carton to find it apparently wasn't possible in this case.

And Safcol seems to have a similar dilemma: "South Australian born and bred" the company may be, but its salmon in this case isn't. It's "produced in Chile". Somewhere in the Adelaide Hills, perhaps?

A RADICAL IDEA

Products claiming they "may contain" certain trace ingredients are by turns annoying (if you end up avoiding everything just in case) and amusing (a bag of nuts that 'may contain' nuts). But here's a radical idea — "traditional" custard that "may contain traces of egg". Have we really come so far from real food that custard doesn't usually contain egg?

WHERE'S THE MEAT?

You've cooked your chook or chops, but making gravy from scratch just seems to take too long — so you go for the gravy mix. But a careful inspection of the very long ingredients lists of these products reveals the truth: the closest they come to their namesakes is lamb or chicken flavour — which we think would be a better description.

100% WHAT?

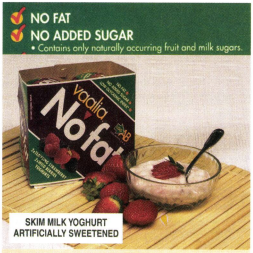
100% fruit, yes, but 100% strawberry? Sadly, no. The companies make these fruit spreads using concentrated fruit juice as a sugar substitute — but not usually the type of fruit named on the front of the jar. It's generally apple, pear, pineapple or grape concentrate. We think the labelling on many 100% fruit spreads could be about 100% clearer.

SUGAR IS SWEET AND SO IS...

... this "naturally sweeter" super-sweet corn. And so you'd expect it to be, perhaps doubly so as the second ingredient is sugar.

MORE CHEESE, PLEASE

According to this label, its blend of cheese and garlic is "deliciously rich and indulgent", but it seems to us that it's unlikely to be the result of the generous amount of cheese — only 8.4 g in a whole pack (560 g), which is about 2 g per person.



LOOK VERY, VERY CLOSELY ...

At least one consumer has been sucked in by the fancy-sounding claims to thinking this product is low-fat yoghurt with fruit — nothing else. Even when you do look at the detail on the side of this box, it says, "No added sugar. Contains only naturally occurring fruit and milk sugars." Oh, and if you look even further (on the *bottom* of the box), you'll see it's also artificially sweetened.

CONTAINS: RECONSTITUTED ORANGE JUICE (98.9%), AND MANGO PUREE (1%), VITAMIN C (300), FLAVOUR.

BUY A BIG ONE, JUST LIKE THE SMALL ONE

They look the same: the only difference on the front is that the 2.4 L bottle doesn't say 100% juice. The catch is you get 5% mango in the 1 L pack and only 1% plus 'flavour' in the big version — and if you check some other sizes, you'll see they've got 2% mango.

INGREDIENTS: RECONSTITUTED ORANGE JUICE (95%), MANGO PUREE (5%), VITAMIN C.

FRUIT OR FRUIT JUICE?

Look closely: products like this one often couch their claims as 25% *fruit*, not *fruit juice*. Check the fine print and you'll see this one contains 10% 'orange peel extract' — it doesn't count as juice, but it does count as 'fruit' content, despite the fact that most people don't juice orange peel.

INGREDIENTS: ORANGE JUICE CONCENTRATE. ORANGE PEEL EXTRACT (10%). SUGAR. PASSIONFRUIT JUICE. FOOD ACID (330). FLAVOUR. PRESERVATIVES (202. 211). WATER ADDED.

ONE OF THESE THINGS IS NOT THE SAME...

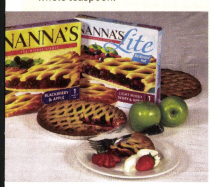
... and if you can guess which one is not like the others, you're doing well, because the fronts of the packs don't give you any hints.

In fact, the first two do contain some raspberry and blackcurrant in addition to the apple and some flavour. But for some inexplicable reason, the apple and strawberry contains apple only — plus flavour and colour.

LIGHT GOES ON

Regular readers know the mantra – light can mean light in colour, flavour, salt, fat, anything. But we were particularly struck by this example of Nanna's 'lite' (reduced-fat) mixed berry pie. Yes, it has 35% less fat than Nanna's regular blackberry and apple pie, absolutely true.

However, it's only 40 kJ lower (that's about 10 calories) per slice. How come? It also has more sugar and that's enough to get the calories back up there. And, of course, what makes the whole thing so silly is that the 'lite' version only saves you 3.7 g of fat per slice — that's not even a whole teaspoon.



INGREDIENTS: Water, Cucumber (12%), Whey Powder, Yogurt Powder (6%), Vegetable Oil, Sugar, Lactic Acid, Hydrogenated Vegetable Oil, Modified Maize Starch (E422), Salt, Lactose, Stabilisers: Xanthan Gum, Guar Gum, Dried Mint, Milk Protein.

YOGHURT NOT ALL IT SEEMS

Yoghurt's healthy image means lots of different products are keen to cash in — but check what you're getting is actually yoghurt. We've reported before on yoghurt-coated products where 'yoghurt' is code for yoghurt powder plus sugar and saturated fat. In this case you'd probably expect yoghurt raita "made to an authentic Indian recipe" to be yoghurt, cucumber, mint and maybe some spices — not the food technology cocktail that the ingredients list reveals it to be (and only 6% yoghurt powder to boot).

LOOKING FOR AN EXCUSE?

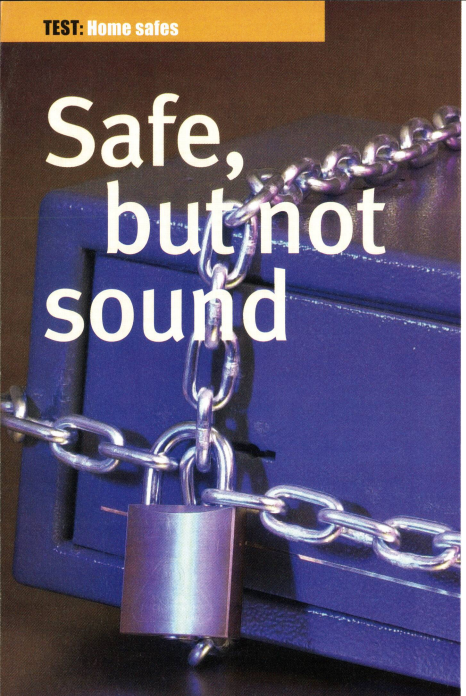
Maybe we're all looking for an excuse to eat chocolate, but it looks as though a war of the choco-giants is at hand. Nestlé Milky Bar now brags it's got the equivalent "goodness" of three glasses of milk in 200 grams, which beats Cadbury's famous "glass and a half" in 250 g of Dairy Milk, even though Nestlé are talking 150 mL glasses and Cadbury 250 mL.

Frankly, we don't really care who's got the most — it's ridiculous to imply chocolate should be a major source of what most people drink milk for: calcium.

BRINGING HOME THE BACON

Sadly, while the ingredients list for this pasta in a "creamy bacon and onion sauce" isn't short, it is somewhat lacking in one key ingredient — not a scrap of bacon to be seen. Of course if you look more carefully at the back of the pack, you may also notice that in the fine print the sauce becomes "bacon and onion flavoured". Well, why didn't they say so on the front?

Safe, but not sound



Think a home safe's the answer to increasing burglary rates? With most of the eight models tested, you could be sorry rather than safe.

PHOTOS: ANDREW SOUND

IN A NUTSHELL

- **On test: eight freestanding theft-resistant home safes** *costing up to $460. Only one withstood all our attempts at prising it open; another resisted a jemmy but not a sledgehammer attack, and the remaining six could be opened with little time or effort.*
- **The cheapest safes** *in the test were the easiest to break into, but the most expensive ones weren't the best.*
- **Don't know whether you need a safe** *and, if so, which type? See pages 14 and 15 for advice on types of safe and lock and* What to look for *in a safe.*

According to the latest figures from the Australian Institute of Criminology, cases of unlawful entry with intent (which includes burglary, break and enter and some stealing) increased by 5% from 1999 to 2000. Considering that more than half of these occurred in private homes, and that about 78% involved taking of property, it's hardly surprising that more people are looking for better ways to protect their valuables at home.

Perhaps you, too, are considering your home safety options and are toying with the idea of buying a home safe for your jewellery, stamps or irreplaceable items of sentimental value. But before you hit the shops in search of a safe, sort out in your mind what you need, want and can afford.

YOUR NEEDS

- **What type of protection do you need?** Do you just want to protect important documents (marriage or birth certificates, insurance policies or records for tax) or keepsakes from fire, or valuable and irreplaceable items from burglars? Choose the type of safe that's been built for the purpose you want it for. See the following sections to help you decide.
- **What size and type of safe can you accommodate?** Think about where you want to put the safe and how big it should be. Choose one that's big enough to hold all the items you want to protect — and consider your future needs, too, especially if you're installing an in-floor or in-wall safe. See *Types of home safe*, page 14, for the advantages and disadvantages of wall, freestanding and in-floor safes.
- **What type of lock do you want?** *Locking it*, page 15, has a description of the various types of lock available.
- **How else can you protect your valuables?** If you don't want to invest in a safe, you could rent a safe deposit box at a bank. Annual rental fees range from just over $50 to more than $600, depending on the size of the box. Or you could hide away your keepsakes in unlikely places, or put them in a hidden, lockable cash box. While this won't provide total protection from thieves, it'll certainly slow them down.

FIRE, THEFT OR BOTH?

If you only want fire protection for items that are of no value to thieves, you don't need an expensive theft-resistant safe from a specialist supplier. Various fire-resistant safes are available from department or hardware stores, as well as from specialist suppliers.

A fire-resistant safe isn't intended to provide theft protection. Its walls and door are generally made of two thin metal (2 mm or less) sheets with insulation (heat-retardant material or lightweight concrete) in between, and it's fairly easily forced open.

An insulated, fire-resistant filing cabinet with a one-hour fire endurance rating should also protect your paper documents from fire — though you'd need a higher fire rating for protecting computer and video data. For more on fire endurance rating, see *Levels of protection*, below.

Safes that can reasonably withstand burglars' attempts to break or drill them open have thick, heavy steel walls. The thicker the steel, the harder the door or walls are to bend or break. However, steel is a good heat conductor, so a steel safe without insulation offers little protection when fire strikes.

While theft-resistant safes must be made of a lot of metal, fire-resistant ones should contain very little. However, a big, good-quality home safe can provide theft *and* fire protection. It would typically have concrete insulation between two thinner steel walls and hard, anti-drill reinforcements around the lock and would set you back at least $1000 or so.

LEVELS OF PROTECTION

On safes or safe locks made overseas you may find an independent agency rating — UL (US), CNN (Europe) or JIL (Asia) — of the level of protection it provides. These safes must meet strict construction guidelines regarding weight, materials, thickness of walls, type of lock and other structural specifications. A sample model must also have passed rigorous fire tests and an attack by a safe expert using certain tools.

There's no standard or testing facility for home safes in Australia and no independent rating that could help you assess an Australian-made safe's suitability for your needs. However, you might find a fire endurance and/or cash contents rating, provided by safe manufacturers to give consumers an indication of the safe's quality and suitability for their purposes.

The **fire endurance rating** indicates approximately how long the temperature inside the safe will remain low enough so as not to burn its contents. Manufacturers say they can't predict a fire's intensity, so they won't guarantee that the safe's contents will stay unaffected for the time specified during a house fire. However, a 30-minute rating is usually considered sufficient for home safes.

The **cash contents rating** is the manufacturer's guide to the quality of the safe — a recommendation as to the amount of money you might feel confident keeping overnight in it. It's *not* the amount of money an insurer would reimburse you if it were stolen from the safe. It's also quite clearly a relative, not absolute, rating that might make best sense when compared with the ratings for other safes from the same manufacturer.

WHAT AND HOW WE TESTED

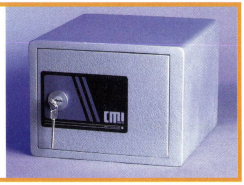
We tested eight readily available, theft-resistant (not fire-resistant), freestanding home safes costing up to $460 with various types of lock. If more than one type of lock was available, we bought the most basic, usually a key lock. All the safes are relatively small and, while not precisely light, could be carried, so should be properly bolted to a floor and/or wall(s) for maximum protection.

The purpose of our test was to find out which safes can best withstand thieves' attempts at breaking them open. So we only used those tools that are easily to hand for casual thieves: a jemmy and a sledgehammer. We didn't attempt lock picking because it requires some expertise the common thief probably won't have. While we also attacked the safes with an axe, we didn't rate them on this test because we could only manage to inflict some superficial damage on the metal surfaces but couldn't force them open to any degree.

WHAT TO BUY

CMI H2K $389

This is the only safe in the test that fully withstood all our attacks. It resisted all attempts to jemmy it open, and while it showed some deformity after 40 blows with a sledgehammer, we still couldn't open it.

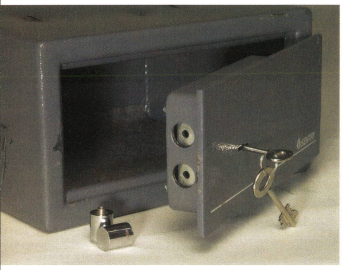


WHAT ABOUT THE REST?

- The **JORGENSEN** safe (right) is worth considering. It stood up very well to our attempts at forcing it open. We didn't succeed with a jemmy, but could partly open the door with the sledgehammer.
- The remaining six safes on test were much easier to break open, requiring relatively little time or effort — four to 20 blows with the sledgehammer. The **SENTRY**'s door even opened fully in less than five minutes with the jemmy, obviating the need for a sledgehammer attack.

SAFES AND HOME CONTENTS INSURANCE

Insurers generally don't encourage you to keep large amounts of cash or very valuable items at home, so don't expect a premium reduction on your home contents insurance if you buy a safe. However, if you do keep large amounts of money or very valuable items at home, your insurer may insist you keep them in a fixed, fire- and theft-resistant safe. Talk to your insurer.



The Sentry's door was easily jemmied open in just a few minutes.

WHERE TO BUY A SAFE

Small, cheaper safes are available from hardware or department stores. Look under 'safes and strongroom doors' in your Yellow Pages to find local locksmiths and specialist stores or agents for more expensive or bigger theft- and/or fire-resistant safes. Ask for a brochure and phone the manufacturer if you need more individual advice.

What to look for

- **Construction:** Look for solid hinges and locks, good-quality welds (long strip or continuous ones, not small spot welds) and reinforcing bars around the inside of the door (preferably along all sides). Gaps around the door should be small so it's more difficult to jemmy it open.
- **Weight:** Weight can be a good indicator of the thickness of the steel used in the construction of a theft-resistant safe. Heavier safes are generally more difficult to force open. Steel of different thickness can be used in the walls and door, so check both.
- **Installation:** A freestanding safe should have mounting holes in either the floor or back (or both) so you can bolt it to the floor and/or wall. Fixing it in a corner could restrict thieves' attempts to jemmy it open. Check when you buy a freestanding safe whether it has all the holes and bolts supplied, and whether installation costs are extra, if you need help.
- **Installation costs:** The costs for installing a safe into a floor or wall are usually not included in the price of the safe. So if you can't do it yourself (you might require a builder's expertise), factor these costs into your budget. Professional installation may cost you more than the safe itself, so it's worth getting several quotes. One manufacturer quoted us around $330 for installing a small in-wall safe, and around $385 to install a small in-floor safe.
- **Features:** Relocking devices (spring-loaded supplementary locks that automatically lock the safe when somebody tries to force the main lock open) provide additional security in more expensive safes. A hard plate around the lock provides additional protection against attempts to drill the safe open.
- **Connection to burglar alarm:** Only safes operated by an electronic digital lock can be connected to a home burglar alarm system. Talk to the supplier when you buy the safe and make sure you install it where it's covered by the alarm system.

Types of home safe

In-wall safes

- **Advantages:** This type of safe is easy to conceal behind a wall hanging, picture or furniture, and can be installed at a convenient height for easy access. However, determined thieves are sure to look in these obvious places.
- **Disadvantages:** Wall safes are generally rated pretty low for theft and fire protection. Because they have to be light enough to rest in a wall, they're only as strong as the bricks and mortar that hold them in place. Cynics even suggest using one only for things thieves don't want, and writing the safe's combination on the door or leaving it unlocked, so you don't get your walls broken up. Another disadvantage is their small depth limit (about 15 cm).

Freestanding safes

- **Advantages:** Appropriately bolted to the floor and/or wall(s), this type of safe offers better burglary protection. It comes in many sizes; larger models are useful for storing bulkier items. Another advantage is that you can take a freestanding safe with you when you move house.
- **Disadvantages:** Larger safes of this type are more difficult to conceal; smaller ones can be masked by other items. If you want to use a large safe on a timber floor, check with the supplier whether the floor needs reinforcement.

In-floor safes

- **Advantages:** This type of safe offers good protection for both theft and fire. It can be installed in a new or existing concrete floor or in a timber floor, either bolted in or embedded in concrete. An in-floor safe is out of sight, easily concealed and takes up no room.
- **Disadvantages:** It's more awkward to get to: you have to get down on your knees to put things in or take them out. And it should be checked regularly for moisture and dirt that could accumulate on the outside. Another disadvantage is that you can't take an in-floor safe with you when you move house.

Brand / model (in rank order)	CMI H2K	JORGENSEN	KING Electronic Digital Safe	LORD SAFE Home Safe AP (B)	BSAFE 30ES	BSAFE DP 202 (D)	INNOVATIONS DASF	SENTRY Steal Safe V110
1 Resistance to jemmy	Excellent	Excellent	Good	Good	Fair	Fair	Fair	Poor
2 Resistance to sledgehammer	Excellent	Fair	Poor	Poor	Poor	Poor	Poor	**(E)**
3 Lock type	Key	Key	Electronic digital plus key	Combination plus key	Electronic digital	Dual key	Electronic digital	Key
4 Can be secured to floor / wall	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Internal shelf	✓		✓	**(C)**	✓			
Weight (kg)	33	39	26	34	21	12	16	11
External dimensions (W x D x H, cm)	32 x 36 x 24	30 x 30 x 30	38 x 30 x 32	38 x 30 x 30	38 x 30 x 32	21 x 26 x 31	35 x 25 x 25	32 x 28 x 17
Internal dimensions* (W x D x H, cm)	30 x 34 x 23	28 x 28 x 28	37 x 24 x 29	37 x 24 x 13 **(C)**	37 x 24 x 29	20 x 24 x 30	34 x 19 x 24	31 x 23 x 16
Usable volume* (L)	23	22	26	12 **(C)**	26	14	16	11
Origin	Australia	Australia	Not stated	China	China	China	China	China
Warranty (years)	5 / 1 **(A)**	1	Not stated	3 months	1	1	1	3
Manufacturer / distributor	CMI Safe Co	Jorgensen	Aus-China Earthmoving	Lord Safe Co	BSafe	BSafe	Innovations	Kambrook
Price ($)**	389	300	460	360	399	285	199	159

Locking it

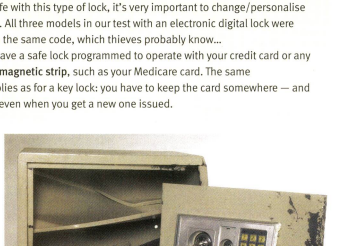
Key locks are the cheapest locks available. They're the traditional type, but generally very secure, reliable and difficult to manipulate. Their only disadvantage is that you have a key to keep somewhere.

Combination dial locks are generally trouble-free — all you have to do is remember the combination. Expect to pay at least $100 more for a safe with this type of lock than for one with a key lock.

Digital electronic locks are a later addition to the safe market, and like all things electronic have a higher potential for breakdown than mechanical locks. They also require batteries, which need replacing (every three years or so). A digital electronic lock costs around $300–$400 more than a key lock. You need this kind of lock if you want to connect your safe to a burglar alarm.

If you buy a safe with this type of lock, it's very important to change/personalise the opening code. All three models in our test with an electronic digital lock were programmed with the same code, which thieves probably know...

You can also have a safe lock programmed to operate with your credit card or any other **card with a magnetic strip**, such as your Medicare card. The same disadvantage applies as for a key lock: you have to keep the card somewhere — and keep the old one even when you get a new one issued.



After 15 minutes with the jemmy on the King Electronic Digital Safe we could only make a small gap at the side of the door, but the sledgehammer did the rest.

* *Approximate — some models have irregular shapes and intrusions.*

** *Prices are what we paid in May 2002.*

(A) *Safe/lock.*

(B) *The manufacturer refers to this safe as the Apache 35, though it's not mentioned on the safe itself.*

(C) *Has a lockable drawer inside, with dimensions of 25 x 15 x 8 cm and a usable volume of 3 L.*

(D) *This safe will be replaced before December by a single-key version, which the manufacturer claims will have a stronger lock.*

(E) *We could force it open with a jemmy, so didn't test its resistance to battering with a sledgehammer.*

1 + 2 Resistance to attack

We rated the safes on their resistance to two types of attack: jemmying and hitting with a sledgehammer. We first inserted a screwdriver (sometimes with the help of a hammer) into the gap around the door and made a slightly larger gap to insert the crowbar, which we then used to jemmy open the safe, spending not more than 15 minutes on each safe. Then we used a 10 pound sledgehammer to smash the safes (40 blows maximum, which takes about two minutes), mainly in the hinge and lock area, to break them open.

The rating descriptors indicate:

Excellent: Withstood the attack totally; couldn't be opened.

Very good: Couldn't be opened during our test, but showed signs that continued attack could lead to limited access within a short time.

Good: Could be accessed to a degree after a lot of effort, but removing the contents was difficult.

Fair: Couldn't be fully accessed but, with some effort, smaller items could be removed.

Poor: Could be fully opened with relatively little effort.

3 Lock type

See *Locking it*, above left, for details.

4 Safe can be secured to floor/wall

For details see *What to look for (installation)*, above left. The **LORD SAFE** doesn't have holes for you to bolt it to the wall or floor, but with a weight of 34 kg wouldn't be too easy to lift and carry away — though not impossible.

word on the street

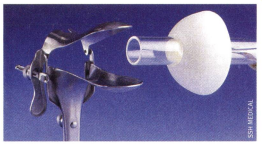
The buzz on what's new and happening in the marketplace

New research: baby walkers delay development

CHOICE and some government authorities have strongly recommended in the past that you don't use a baby walker for your child. They allow babies greater mobility than their developmental stage allows for, and give a baby access to dangerous objects normally out of reach — and to stairs. And at least one study has shown they're responsible for more injuries in six- to 12-month-olds than any other piece of equipment.

New research from Ireland now shows baby walkers not only don't help with developmental milestones like crawling, standing alone and walking, but delay them. Furthermore, as the walkers encourage babies to walk on their toes, they can cause calf muscles to tighten and infants to become habitual toe walkers.

Verdict: Again, don't buy one.



SSH MEDICAL

Persist with the duck bill? You must be daffy!

Does the thought of having a pap smear make your toes curl? It's recommended that all women over 18 take this important cervical cancer screening test every two years, yet many women don't — they put it off and off. For many women it's the spectre of the metal 'duck bill' speculum — which looks more like a medieval torture device than a medical instrument — that keeps them away.

A recent Australian invention, the **VEDA-SCOPE**, replaces the old duck bill and claims to offer a more comfortable experience for patients: it's shorter and smoother and in a randomised, controlled trial commissioned by the manufacturer, over 90% of women said they preferred it. It's also good for doctors — light and magnification, as well as its smaller size, allow better viewing.

It's not suitable for pregnant or recently pregnant women, and there's a small additional cost (in the order of $10, to cover the cost of disposable parts) for its use. **VEDA-SCOPE** is available at many doctors' surgeries around Australia: for more information and to find your nearest participating doctor, go to www.sshmedical.com or phone 1300 133 095.

Zigzag fridge

One of the problems with side-by-side fridge/freezers is the shelves are quite narrow, particularly in the freezer — in some we've tested you can't fit a pizza box lying down.

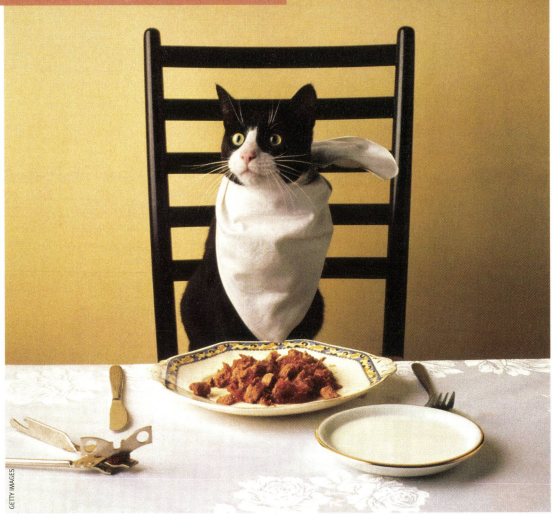
Enter **MAYTAG** with its 800 L **WIDE-BY-SIDE** fridge. The innovative 'zigzag' design means you get wide and narrow sections in both fridge and freezer compartments. And the water dispenser and ice-making apparatus are in the narrow part of the freezer, so you can really make the most of the wide bit.

We haven't tested it, but our sister organisation in the US has, and gave it a 'good' overall rating. The main problem it found was warm spots throughout the fridge, which seems to be fairly characteristic of side-by-sides because of the difficulty of circulating cold air through the tall compartments. They also point out that **MAYTAG** side-by-sides are one of the more repair-prone brands in the US — the brand's not popular enough in Australia for us to have information on enough samples to report on their reliability here.

Verdict: If you're in the market for a large side-by-side and can afford the $5499 price tag, the **WIDE-BY-SIDE MZ2727EW** may well be worth a look.

MAYTAG

Have you seen or heard about something new and innovative you'd like us to investigate? We can't promise to check out everything you tell us about, but we'd love to know what attracts your interest. Email wots@choice.com.au, or see page 2 for other ways to contact us (please mark it to the attention of Word on the Street).



GETTY IMAGES

IN A NUTSHELL

- **For most healthy pets** *there's no evidence that 'premium' pet foods improve overall health and longevity, compared to cheaper foods that meet appropriate standards. Look for claims of a food being 'complete and balanced'.*
- **Dry pet food** *has a higher energy content than wet food, so your pet doesn't need to eat as much of it. And it's good for their dental health.*

Good enough to eat?

You want the best for your pet. But do dogs and cats really need expensive, fancy food? What should they be eating?

With pet food, "the best for your pet" now seems to mean "omegas for skin and coat health", "antioxidants for systemic health" or even "a new approach to health" altogether. If you took too much notice of some of those ads, you'd start thinking it was downright irresponsible to keep feeding your moggy from a carton or your pooch from a tin.

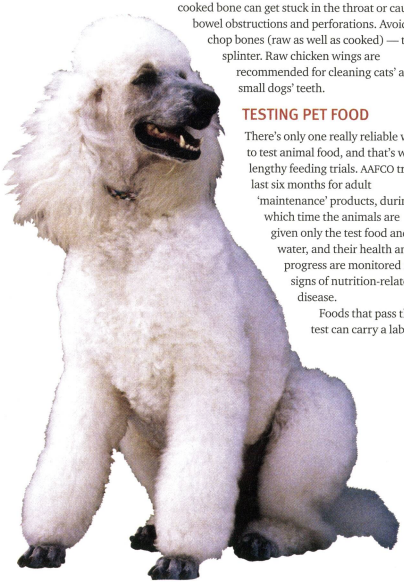
But that's not true. Many of the ordinary pet foods available in supermarkets have been tested to a high standard to ensure they provide a complete and balanced diet. You don't generally need fancy foods to keep your cat or dog healthy, or to pay the high prices asked for premium foods sold through pet shops and vet clinics.

We took a close look at food available for cats and dogs. Among our findings:

- There's an internationally recognised 'standard' for pet foods, which you can rely on. It's awarded to foods that have successfully completed feeding trials developed by the Association of American Feed Control Officials (AAFCO). This

means it has the right amount of nutrients and energy to keep your pet healthy.

- There's an enormous range in prices, even among the same categories of food. But price isn't a reliable guide to quality. As our table shows, some AAFCO-standard foods are relatively cheap. Tinned food is a lot more expensive than dry food.
- Most 'special' foods cost more than other pet foods of the same type. Among their claims are to provide a healthier coat, smaller faecal volume and better-smelling breath, but for most healthy pets there's no evidence that they improve overall health and longevity, compared to cheaper foods that meet the AAFCO feeding trial standard.
- Dry food has a higher energy content than wet food, so your pet doesn't need to eat as much of it.
- For dental health and to keep their jaws working well, cats and dogs need a regular supply of foods that require chewing. But don't feed cooked bones that your pet can crunch up and swallow, as pieces of cooked bone can get stuck in the throat or cause bowel obstructions and perforations. Avoid chop bones (raw as well as cooked) — they splinter. Raw chicken wings are recommended for cleaning cats' and small dogs' teeth.



TESTING PET FOOD

There's only one really reliable way to test animal food, and that's with lengthy feeding trials. AAFCO trials last six months for adult 'maintenance' products, during which time the animals are given only the test food and water, and their health and progress are monitored for signs of nutrition-related disease.

Foods that pass this test can carry a label claim along the lines of: "Animal feeding tests using AAFCO procedures substantiate that Product X provides complete and balanced nutrition."

Unfortunately, some foods that have met AAFCO feeding trial requirements don't advertise the fact on the label. It'd be much more useful if they did. Look for the words 'complete and balanced' if there's no mention of AAFCO.

The US National Academy of Sciences' National Research Council (NRC) and AAFCO also set food formulation standards. These are useful, but don't provide the same guarantee, as they're based on a chemical analysis, not actual feeding trials.

WHAT ABOUT THOSE SPECIAL CLAIMS?

We've all seen the ads. Beautiful, glossy-coated, energetic dogs bounding through the fields, winning prizes, not quite co-operating (in the most endearing way) for the vet. But it's not just the food that makes these animals such winners. They've been bred and trained that way too.

Despite the advertising claims, there's little evidence that premium foods will be more beneficial than other 'complete and balanced' foods for an already healthy animal.

As one animal nutrition expert told us, "There's no convincing evidence that premium diets improve overall health or longevity. It's only when a pet is under physical or emotional stress or is suffering from a health problem that a premium diet becomes clearly beneficial to health."

So exactly how do the 'special' claims measure up?

- **Real meat.** Premium brands are more likely to claim they use 'real' muscle meat, poultry or seafood as their main ingredient. Some supermarket brands use less muscle meat and make up the balance with meat by-products like organs, blood and bones, which are also highly nutritious.

  Having bigger chunks of real meat will probably make the food look more appetising to you, but it'll mean little to your pet. A higher proportion of muscle meat and other high-quality ingredients, though, can lead to a reduction in faecal volume. The use of these ingredients means the food is digested more easily and therefore there's less waste. However, many supermarket brands use muscle meat too.
- **Healthy skin and hair.** Omega-3 fatty acids are all the rage for shiny skin and coat. The fact is, any cat or dog getting good-quality, complete and balanced nutrition should have healthy skin and hair. However, some veterinary studies suggest omega-3s may have a positive effect if your pet has inflammatory skin disease (dermatitis), which causes itching. Any difference you'll notice may take several months.

Even ordinary supermarket products like **FRISKIES**

Go Cat make omega-3 claims, so you don't necessarily need to pay more for premium products. But it's up to the manufacturers how much they put into the food, so products will vary.

Joint disorders. Manufacturers have come up with products containing glucosamine, chondroitin sulphate and green-lipped mussels to help prevent canine joint disorders and other aches and pains. Again, claims are sometimes vague and often anecdotal. However, there's growing evidence that some of these products do have an effect on joint disease.

Product formulations aren't standardised so it's difficult to evaluate them. Animal nutritionists and regulatory authorities need to reach an agreement about optimal levels that are beneficial in pet foods.

Antioxidants. There's little evidence yet that healthy pets require additional antioxidants, like vitamin C or E or beta-carotene, over and above those already available in complete and balanced pet foods. Synthetic antioxidants in pet foods, like BHA and ethoxyquin, aren't there for the animal's health, but to ensure the food stays shelf-stable and doesn't go rancid.

Fibre. **ROYAL CANIN Indoor 27** is "designed" for "adult cats living entirely indoors". It contains fibre, claimed to "help reduce stool odour by stimulating beneficial intestinal flora and absorbing toxins". It's a similar claim to those for probiotic yoghurt and the like "stimulating beneficial intestinal flora" in humans, but there's no definitive evidence about their role in pet food.

Dental health. Animals keep their teeth clean and gums healthy by chewing on dry foods, raw bones and chewable toys. The abrasive action from the chewing scrapes tartar off the teeth. Some foods — such as **WHISKAS with Vita-Bites** — have added calcium to "promote healthy teeth", but it's not necessary. All 'complete and balanced' products have adequate calcium.

Anti-furball products. Cats swallow their own fur all the time, and most of it's digested and passed naturally. But if they swallow too much or it collects in the stomach and oesophagus, it can form a furball, which may be regurgitated. Many supermarket and premium products are anti-furball formulations — increased fibre is supposed to pass the hair gently through the digestive system and stop furballs forming. There's no agreed definition for a furball formula, but if these products seem to work for your cat, it's fine to keep using them. Make sure your cat's diet is based on 'complete and balanced' products overall.

THE BOTTOM LINE

At least 70% of what dogs and cats eat should be 'complete and balanced' products that have passed AAFCO feeding trials. If you want to give them home-made food, get advice from your vet first (see page 21 for more).

A healthy dog will be alert, energetic, with a good coat and not too thin or fat. It's similar for cats, although alertness and energy can sometimes be hard to judge! If this description doesn't fit your pet, they may not be getting a complete and balanced diet.

Commercial dry food is a good base, as most products are complete and balanced, and it's cheaper than tinned food. Make sure there's a ready supply of clean drinking water as well.

Many tinned foods are also complete, although to keep the teeth clean and the jaw working well it's important to supplement these with dry foods, a raw bone, tough meat or a chewable toy several times a week.

If you use dog rolls, choose AAFCO-tested ones. Our sister organisation in New Zealand took a close look at the market and found few that had been AAFCO-tested by independent feeding trials.

If your pet is unwell or develops skin or gastrointestinal problems, get advice from your vet.

HOW DO YOU KNOW WHAT YOU'RE BUYING?

Under the Trade Practices Act, pet foods, like any other product, can't make misleading or untrue claims. You can't call a dog roll 'beef' if it doesn't have beef in it.

But what if it has some beef — just not very much? There are no government regulatory guidelines, but the Pet Food Industry Association of Australia's (PFIAA) code of practice is based on best practice and incorporates standards for labelling, marketing, nutrition design and claims.

For example, the code stipulates that a 'complete and balanced' or 'nutritionally complete' pet food must meet the minimum recommended nutritive requirements for that species. Pet snacks or treats should be labelled 'complementary pet food', as they aren't nutritionally complete.

A pet food may not be labelled 'beef' unless it contains at least 25% beef and beef is the major ingredient. If beef isn't the main ingredient but still makes up 25% or more of the meat, and the product is the 'beefiest' in the range, it can be labelled 'beef dinner' or 'beef casserole'. If more than 5% but less than 25% of the food is beef, the words 'with beef' can be used — as in 'dog stew with beef'. But be warned: if it just says 'beef flavour', the product is likely to contain hardly any beef at all.

Ingredients must be listed in descending order by weight — so the first ingredient is the most plentiful.

No Australian standard

There's no national standard for processed tinned or dry pet food. If it's imported it has to comply with Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS) import regulations and must be certified to come from disease-free animals that were inspected before and after slaughter.

For processed pet food made in Australia some state regulations apply, otherwise the industry is largely self-regulated. Major manufacturers are members of PFIAA and have to comply with its code of conduct and AAFCO standards.

Fresh and frozen pet meat is regulated by the state and territories' agriculture portfolios or meat authorities. The Primary Industry Ministerial Council's Meat Standards Committee is working on establishing a standard for such pet meat.

Brand / product (in alphabetical order within groups)	Type of food	1 AAFCO-trialled	2 Size bought (g)	2 Price per kg ($)	3 Energy content (Cal / kg)	4 Cost per year ($)
Market leaders: dog food						
CHUM	Tinned	✓	700	1.61	700	830
FRISKIES Lucky Dog	Dry	✓	3000	1.76	**(D)**	**(D)**
PEDIGREE Meaty Bites	Dry	✓	3000	1.66	3400	210
PEDIGREE Pal	Tinned	✓	700	1.97	750	970
Dog food with special claims						
EUKANUBA	Dry	✓	3000	7.32	4332	740
HILL'S SCIENCE DIET	Dry	✓	4500	7.99	3841	910
HILL'S SCIENCE DIET	Tinned	✓	418	5.26	975	2360
IAMS	Dry	✓	3630	5.22	4060	563
PEDIGREE Advance	Dry	✓	3000	6.98	4000	760
PEDIGREE Principal	Dry	✓	2000	3.71	3710	440
PURINA One	Dry	✓	3000	3.43	4263	350
PURINA Pro Plan	Dry	✓	1500	9.00	4179	940
ROYAL CANIN	Dry	✓	1000	8.95	3900	1010
SUPERCOAT	Dry	✓	1500	2.04	3550	250
SUPERCOAT	Tinned	**(A)**	700	2.86	1900–2400 **(E)**	520–660 **(E)**
Market leaders: cat food						
DINE	Tinned	**(B)**	400	3.23	800	440
FRISKIES Go-Cat	Dry	✓	375	3.60	3380	120
WHISKAS	Dry	✓	1000	4.50	3650	140
WHISKAS Jellimeat	Tinned	✓	400	2.88	750	420
Cat food with special claims						
EUKANUBA	Dry	✓	3000	9.98	4702	230
FRISKIES Vital Balance	Dry	✓	1500	5.99	3740	180
HILL'S SCIENCE DIET	Dry	✓	4500	8.43	4080	230
HILL'S SCIENCE DIET	Tinned	✓	156	14.10	1093	1410
IAMS	Dry	✓	3000	8.98	4483	220
IAMS	Tinned	✓	396	9.09	1416	700
PURINA One	Dry	✓	1500	5.33	4313	140
PURINA Pro Plan	Dry	✓	1500	9.00	4281	230
ROYAL CANIN Fit 32	Dry	✓	4000	8.56	3850	240
ROYAL CANIN Indoor 27	Dry	✓	2000	11.98	3500	380
SUPERCOAT	Dry	✓	500	4.40	3250	150
WHISKAS Advance	Dry	✓	3000	8.32	3850	240
WHISKAS T.O.P.	Dry	✓	500	7.00	3850	200
WHISKAS with Vita-Bites	Dry	**(C)**	400	4.38	3650	130

(A) *Hasn't been tested in AAFCO feeding trials, but meets AAFCO/NRC formulation standards (see* Testing pet food, *page 18).*

(B) *Doesn't make any claims on the label. The manufacturer says it's assumed Dine is given as part of a "repertoire" of food.*

(C) *Feeding trials are currently under way.*

(D) *We couldn't calculate how much it costs per year because the manufacturer wouldn't tell us the product's energy content before publication.*

(E) *Depending on the variety.*

The table lists the market-leading dog and cat foods plus some other standard formulations for adults that make special claims for adult pet maintenance.

1 AAFCO-trialled

This product has been tested successfully in feeding trials undertaken by the Association of American Feed Control Officials (AAFCO). It has the right amount of nutrients and energy and can claim to be a 'complete and balanced' pet food. See page 18 for more on this.

2 Size bought/price per kg

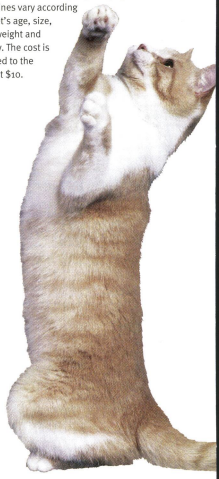
The price per kilogram is based on the price we paid (in a supermarket or pet care shop in Sydney) for the product in the size indicated — which isn't always the largest (and generally most economical) size available. Buying in bulk can usually lower your yearly feeding costs.

3 Energy content

This is the metabolisable energy content in Calories per kilogram (Cal/kg).

4 Cost per year

Prices (and pets) can vary considerably, so our cost per year is only a comparative guide, not an absolute. It's based on the unit price and energy content mentioned, and on the daily calorie requirements of a 20 kg dog or a 5 kg cat. Nutritional guidelines vary according to a pet's age, size, body weight and activity. The cost is rounded to the nearest $10.



Common questions about pet food

Should cats and dogs eat the same food?

No. Dogs are omnivores, while cats are carnivores and need the higher levels of protein, fat, niacin and arachidonic acid provided by meat. They can't use vegetable sources to make vitamin A as dogs do, so must get it from meat. They're also sensitive to thiamin, potassium and arginine deficiencies.

Taurine is essential for cats and a deficiency can cause heart disease and blindness. There's sufficient taurine in most cat foods, so the 'added taurine' claimed by some is not necessarily advantageous.

The protein content of cat food is unnecessarily high for dogs.

Do younger and older pets need special foods?

In dietary terms, AAFCO recognises that animals go through three life stages. The first is growth: kittens and puppies have extra nutrient needs and a special food is recommended. The second is when a mother is nursing: special foods are recommended for a lactating cat or dog. The third stage is simply adulthood, during which animals need to maintain their 'complete and balanced' nutrient intake. In most cases, older pets don't need special foods because they've no consistent nutrition peculiarities — though some may need to lose weight and others to put it on.

Is milk bad for pets?

Cats and dogs are a bit like us: some like milk and some don't, some can tolerate it and some can't. If your pet likes drinking milk, that's fine. A pet that can't tolerate milk will usually suffer from diarrhoea. Special reduced-lactose cat milks are available, but they're expensive and usually unnecessary.

Is a home-made diet better than a commercial one?

If your pet is eating 'complete and balanced' foods, tested by an AAFCO trial, it'd be hard to improve on their diet with home-made substitutes. However, if you have the time to prepare a home-made diet for your pet, ask your vet for advice on what to include. Table scraps and other leftovers shouldn't make up more than 30% of your pet's dietary intake — preferably less.

Should pets eat a variety of foods?

Animals are mostly concerned about meeting their energy needs rather than variety. But if you do feed your pet the same thing every day, you may find it reluctant to eat different foods, so a variety may be the best approach.

Why do dogs and cats eat grass?

It's believed some cats and dogs chew grass when they feel nauseous. Others may do it out of boredom or they may just like it. Eating grass isn't harmful and is no cause for alarm.

Is there any risk of BSE with pet food?

There shouldn't be. BSE in animals hasn't been detected in Australia.

Pet food products must meet stringent import health standards or comply with state or territory legislation that applies to pet food production in Australia.

Pet food may only be imported from approved manufacturing plants, and only from countries or zones that are classified in the International Animal Health Code as being BSE-free or BSE provisionally free (no cases have been reported, but no risk analysis has been undertaken).

If pet food is imported from countries or zones classified as having a minimal BSE risk, the animals must have undergone an ante- and post-mortem inspection and no specific risk material may be included in the food.

There's no evidence that dogs can contract BSE. Cats are susceptible to a feline form of the disease (FSE), but there haven't been any cases reported in recent years.

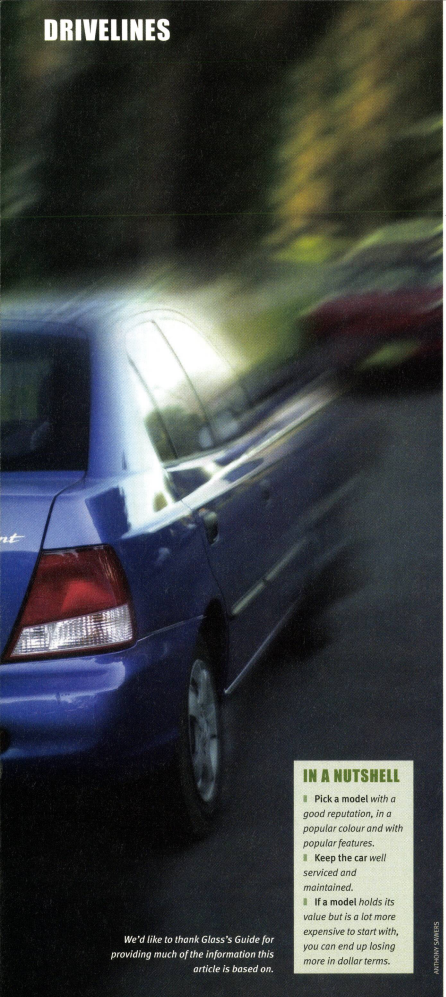
Should pets be fed only once a day?

Most cats can eat when they like, but if you leave food out for dogs or greedy cats, they're likely to overeat.

- Growing dogs should be allowed to eat until they're full in a short time period two or three times a day. If there's any sign of obesity in a pup it's important to reduce its food intake: a fat puppy isn't a healthy puppy. As they get older the eating time doesn't matter as much as the quantity.
- Working, pregnant or lactating dogs and very small breeds can't usually eat enough at one sitting to meet their energy needs and should be fed smaller amounts more often.
- Kittens and pregnant or lactating cats need to be fed at frequent intervals.
- Once a day is fine for other cats and dogs.

Does dry cat food cause bladder problems?

Cat biscuits used to, but manufacturers have altered the formulation and the problem has reduced. Cats fed on well-formulated dry food don't run a higher risk of getting bladder stones. Give them access to clean drinking water at all times.



CAR

Buying a new car is a big purchase but a bad investment. But there are ways you can limit the impact of car depreciation on your hip pocket.

Unless you pick a model that'll end up being the Jaguar E-type or Mercedes 300SL gull-wing roadster of 2020 (and keep it that long), you're burning money as soon as you drive your new wheels out of the dealer's yard. Your car has become a secondhand model, and you've already lost the dealer delivery charges and registration costs.

Depending on their size, cars depreciate on average by around 14% a year for the first three years, and about 6–8% after that.

But there are big differences between models. While only very few will become a collectors' item such as the gull-wing Merc, some hold their value much better than others — see our list of the top five in various categories, far right.

HOW TO MINIMISE DEPRECIATION

There are some things worth considering when buying a car, to minimise the impact of depreciation on your hip pocket a few years later when you sell it:

- Buy a secondhand car. For example, a one- or two-year-old car may still have its manufacturer's warranty, but is likely to have lost quite a bit of its original price.
- Consider buying during an end-of-year sale (when dealers try to unload the previous year's stock), or a model run-out sale. You may lose money on the resale value of such a car: you're basically buying a one-year-old model in the end-of-year sale, and a superseded model in the run-out sale. However, you may save thousands on the purchase price.

IN A NUTSHELL

- **Pick a model** *with a good reputation, in a popular colour and with popular features.*
- **Keep the car** *well serviced and maintained.*
- **If a model** *holds its value but is a lot more expensive to start with, you can end up losing more in dollar terms.*

We'd like to thank Glass's Guide for providing much of the information this article is based on.

ANTHONY SAMUELS

depreciation

- Look for 'drive-away' deals, where you don't have to pay dealer delivery and registration fees.
- While a certain model may have a better resale percentage of its original value, you can still lose more in dollar terms if it's much more expensive than a comparable model.

For example, a $50,000 car that still has 75% of its original value after three years will be worth $37,500 — you lose $12,500. A $40,000 car with 70% residual value will be worth $28,000 — you only lose $12,000 (plus you save on the original outlay).

- Reputation generally has an impact on resale values. So buy a make and model with a good track record for quality and reliability. Check our reliability survey (CHOICE, September 2001) for the most reliable ones.
- Being very adventurous when choosing the colour and equipment of your car may cause problems when you're trying to sell it. For example, that pink metallic paint may be quite unique, and you may well be able to live without air conditioning in your car. But potential buyers may think quite differently, and use such features to negotiate a cheaper price — or be scared off altogether.

OPTIMISE THE RESALE VALUE

- Have your car serviced regularly and keep all the service records. This provides prospective buyers with a service history and indicates how well the vehicle has been maintained.
- If possible, garage your car so paint damage and interior wear due to environmental conditions (such as sun and dirt) are minimised.
- Wash and polish it regularly, and keep it well maintained inside. Worn carpet, cigarette burns or tears in the upholstery can give buyers the impression of a generally badly maintained car.
- Small damage (such as stone chips, scratches or small dents) may be used by potential buyers to negotiate down the price. Consider having it repaired if the cost isn't higher than the potential drop in the sale price.
- Selling a car privately usually gets a higher price than trading it in. However, you have to put in time and effort, potentially spending a number of weekends waiting for buyers.

Also, selling your old car before getting a new one could mean you're without transport for a while. And if you buy the new one first, you'll have to pay registration and insurance for two cars until you can sell the old one — which could take longer than you expect.

TOP FIVE VALUE-HOLDERS

The top five vehicles in each category showed consistent top residual values over the past two to three years.

Like all historic assessments, this doesn't guarantee they'll do similarly well in the future. Apart from the general economic situation, the discontinuation of a model range or release of other popular models is likely to influence future resale values.

Small cars

- **SUBARU Impreza GX (AWD)**, sedan.
- **HOLDEN Astra City** and **CD**, hatch.
- **SUBARU Impreza WRX**, sedan.
- **VW Golf GL**, hatch.
- **HONDA Civic Vi**, hatch.

Medium cars

- **SUBARU Liberty RX**, sedan and wagon.
- **SUBARU Liberty GX (AWD)**, sedan and wagon.
- **HOLDEN Vectra CD**, four-cylinder hatch.
- **MAZDA 626 Classic**, hatch.
- **HOLDEN Vectra GL**, four-cylinder hatch.

Large cars

- **HOLDEN Commodore S**, sedan.
- **HOLDEN Commodore SS**, sedan.
- **FORD XR8**, sedan.
- **FORD XR6**, sedan.
- **HOLDEN Vectra**, six-cylinder hatch and sedan.

Luxury cars

- **BMW 325i**, sedan.
- **BMW 330Ci**, convertible.
- **MERCEDES-BENZ CLK 320 Avantgarde**, cabriolet.
- **BMW 325Ci**, coupé.
- **BMW 525i Executive**, sedan.

Sports cars

- **MAZDA MX-5**, convertible.
- **NISSAN 200SX Spec R**, coupé.
- **NISSAN 200SX Spec S**, coupé.
- **TOYOTA MR2 Spyder**, convertible.
- **VW Golf GL**, cabriolet.

4WDs

- **MERCEDES-BENZ ML320** and **320 Luxury**, wagon.
- **MERCEDES-BENZ ML270 CDi** and **CDi Luxury**, wagon.
- **BMW X5**, wagon.
- **VOLVO Cross Country**, wagon.
- **SUBARU Outback**, wagon.

People movers

- **HONDA Odyssey**, seven-seat and V6L six-seat wagon.
- **CHRYSLER Grand Voyager SE**, wagon.
- **MAZDA MPV**, wagon.
- **KIA Carnival**, wagon.
- **TOYOTA Tarago GLi**, wagon.

To find out more about used car values, check the database on our website. Go to www.choice.com.au, type 'Used car database' in the search box and follow the links.

GEOFF AMBLER

Reserve Bank urges caution on property investors

In a recent statement the Reserve Bank of Australia warned that returns for property investors might not be sustainable in the future.

The RBA said house prices increased nationally by about 9% on average in the past five years, with a 17% increase last year alone.

It warns that previous capital gains are no guarantee of future gains and notes that rents haven't gone up at the same pace as housing prices. This has already led to lower yields (the ratio of the rent to the price of the property) for property investors.

Currently vacancy rates for rental properties are going up. In the past, high vacancy rates have led to a fall in rents as supply greatly exceeds demand.

For more information use our property investment calculator — go to www.choice.com.au/money and look under tools.

IOOF DEMUTUALISES

Australia's largest friendly society, IOOF, has issued shares to its members and is now working towards becoming a listed company. Founded in 1846, it provides funds management and health insurance services.

IOOF members will receive a minimum entitlement of 140 shares, with most receiving additional shares allocated by the amount invested and length of membership.

IOOF says its health insurance policies won't change following the decision. For more information, see our 'Health insurance guide' with its online hospital insurance compare-a-policy tool (use the sidebar link in the article to get to it) at www.choice.com.au/health.

HOW TO GET HEARD

Only 6% of Australians always complain if something goes wrong. The rest complain only sometimes or never.

The Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC) has released a free step-by-step guide to solving a problem with financial services and products. The main steps are:

- Raise the matter directly with the company concerned — often things can be fixed with a phone call.
- If this is unsatisfactory, make a written complaint, using the company's internal complaint procedures.
- If you're not happy with the outcome of this, take your complaint to an independent complaints resolution scheme — for example, the Banking Ombudsman if you have a problem with your bank. The guide explains which schemes to go to for which type of complaint and gives their contact details.

For a copy of 'You can complain', contact the ASIC infoline on 1300 300 630, or go to www.fido.asic.gov.au for the brochure under 'publications'.

A BANK LISTENS!

ANZ bank recently aroused the anger of its customers by planning to reduce the interest-free period for personal credit card holders who pay their monthly accounts through the bank's direct debit facility.

This disadvantaged credit card holders who pay their balance off in full every month, especially those who'd linked the card to their mortgage offset account.

After receiving more than 2500 complaints the bank reversed its decision.

Movies at home

Creating your own cinema sound on the cheap.

PHOTOS: ANTHONY SAUNDERS

The introduction of DVDs has made it possible to have cinema-like surround sound for movies in your living room. But surround-sound systems based on individual components can be expensive and often require expertise to set up properly.

Some manufacturers have come up with systems you buy as a set — they're supposed to be easy to install and use and come at more affordable prices. We picked a few of them to see if they meet their claims.

All the products include a DVD player, an amplifier and five speakers. All but the **SONY** also have a sixth speaker called a sub-woofer for bass sounds. None comes with a TV or other video display.

GETTING SET UP

At present there doesn't seem to be a simple solution to the number of cables and wires necessary to connect all the components of a home theatre system. We'll have to wait for wireless speakers to lose those unsightly speaker cables, but that's only part of the story. If you've ever had to deal with the tangled spaghetti of cables that can result from having a number of hifi and video components in one system, you'll appreciate the need for clear coding to help with both setting up and checking connections.

Apart from speakers, the **SONY** system has four other components that need to be connected and the **PIONEER** has two — both have clearly labelled cables and we had no trouble hooking them up. The others only need their speakers connected to a single unit, and the **PIONEER** and **AKAI** have these cables labelled or colour-coded as well. All the products have easy-to-follow instructions except the **SAMSUNG**. Its instructions for connecting a TV or other viewing device are OK, but the audio instructions lack detail.

The ideal home theatre system requires you to be the same distance from all speakers (except the sub-woofer), while still being the correct viewing distance from the screen (see Figure 1, page 27). Most of us don't have a room built to these specifications, so we have to make compromises with the positioning of speakers.

Fortunately the systems tested can introduce delays in the sound from speakers to compensate for them

WHAT TO BUY

Pioneer HTZ77DVD		$1899
AKAI DV-P221SS	TEST BUY	$1199

IN A NUTSHELL

- **Your satisfaction** *with these systems is likely to depend on the weight you place on sound quality, which tends to be sacrificed a little for ease of use and a cheaper price. But the top-rating* ***PIONEER*** *produces good sound and the other systems are fine if you accept this compromise.*
- **All have good** *picture quality.*
- **Setting up is simple,** *but balancing sound can be tricky.*

being too close to your listening position. This is done either by telling the system how far the speaker is from the ideal (the simpler way), or by telling it how many milliseconds the delay should be. The LG and SAMSUNG use the latter system but do have a formula so you can calculate the milliseconds based on distance.

Unfortunately all the instructions on how to balance the sound like this could have been better. They were accurate, but often not in the same section as the set-up instructions, and were hard to follow.

TESTING 1, 2, 3 ...

We ran each system through our technical tests for picture and sound quality, and also had an expert panel view and listen to them. The AKAI was the best for picture quality, but even the LG with the lowest score still produced a good picture.

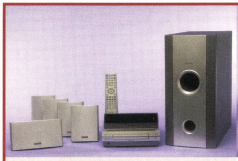
The differences in sound performance are more apparent, with the PIONEER clearly the best performer. However, even the SAMSUNG and LG with the lowest scores produce OK sound. Their major failings are low power, unclear definition between instruments, lack of bass response, and they can be a little 'thin' at higher volumes.

Don't expect any of these systems to match a more expensive home theatre system for sound. The compromise for convenience and reduced cost is mainly in this area, so if sound quality is really important to you you'll probably be better off paying more.

We also checked to see how well they could handle a faulty CD and DVD; they all did well.

Profiles

Models are profiled in rank order. Prices are recommended retail, as provided by manufacturers in May or July 2002. If you shop around you may find th



PIONEER HTZ77DVD

Price: $1899

GOOD POINTS

- The best for sound quality.
- Best onscreen and front panel display and indicators.
- Digital audio input (optical).
- Bookmarking (you can mark the start of a section so you can easily jump to it later).
- Remote can be used to control some TVs.
- Child lock (which makes front panel keys inoperative).

BAD POINTS

- The player unit and the sub-woofer have to be placed close to each other because of a short special cable used for system interconnections between them.
- No 'resume play' after pressing 'stop' for CDs.

AKAI DV-P221SS

Price: $1199

BEST BUY

GOOD POINTS

- The best for picture quality.
- Remote control, onscreen and front panel display and indicators are easy to use.

BAD POINTS

- High standby energy usage — if several thousand households bought one of these systems, there'd be a lot of CO_2 generated for wasted electricity.
- No 'resume play' after pressing 'stop' for CDs or DVDs.

SONY MHC-S9D

Price: $1699

GOOD POINTS

- You can load up to three discs and play them in succession.
- Digital audio input (optical).
- Microphone socket at the front.
- Includes a dual-cassette tape deck.
- Remote control can be used for controlling a Sony TV.
- Karaoke controls.

BAD POINTS

- No sub-woofer (but there is a socket for an active sub-woofer).
- The speakers and main unit are much bigger than with the other systems — see the photo.
- Not as easy to set up as the top two models.
- Can't play MP3 format from a recordable CD.

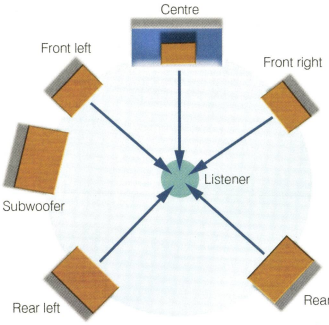


Figure 1. Ideally you'd sit at the right viewing distance from the screen as well as at the same distance from each speaker (except the sub-woofer). The systems can compensate if your room doesn't allow this, but getting the sound balance right can be tricky.

per. Check the table (page 28) for scores and for features not mentioned here.

LG DA-3530

Price: $999

GOOD POINTS

- Easy to use remote and front panel controls.
- Bookmarking.
- Two composite video and L/R audio sockets.

BAD POINTS

- Not as easy to set up as the top two models.
- No digital audio output.
- No dynamic range control (see *Features to check for*, page 29).

SAMSUNG HT-DL100

Price: $1299

GOOD POINTS

- Good onscreen display and indicators.
- Remote control can be used to control some TVs.

BAD POINTS

- Not as easy to set up as the top two models.
- Can't decode DTS sound (but it can be output to a DTS-capable amplifier — see *Plain-English sound and video*, page 28, for an explanation). Samsung says models produced from March 2002 on have DTS decoding built in.

Before you buy

- Measure your room and decide where the cables will go.
- Measure the space where the player will go and ensure there's enough space to fit it and enough cable to reach your TV. The **SONY** system is made up of four separate components (as well as the speakers) and takes up quite a lot more space than the other systems in this test (see the profile photo, below left). It also has the shortest cables for the front and centre speakers.

  Most audio-visual equipment needs some breathing space so it won't overheat. If you're unsure how much, check the manufacturer's recommendations.
- Make sure a system has the right connections for your TV. DVD players don't have an RF connection (normal aerial), so older TVs without a composite video input may not work with them (see *Plain-English sound and video*, page 28).
- Big or open-plan rooms generally absorb more sound, but this can be influenced by a number of other factors like the building materials, number and size of windows and furnishings. Although it has no sub-woofer, the **SONY** does have the most power per channel of any of the systems in this test, so it could be a good option if you've a big space to fill and can place the speakers near walls (their design means they'll work best there).
- Essentially sound quality is a matter of taste, so try to listen to the system before you buy. If you can trial a system in your home, all the better.
- None of the systems in this test can be connected to another set of speakers for a separate room. However, all except the **LG** have a digital audio output socket, so you can connect them to a separate amplifier that can decode a digital signal, and via it to speakers.
- As you'd expect, all the models in this test can play a region 4 DVD (which includes Australia). The **PIONEER** and **SONY** can also handle region 1 (the US and Canada). If you intend buying DVDs overseas, check with the player's manufacturer and get a written confirmation that the player will handle the region you'll be buying from.

Brand / model (in rank order)	PERFORMANCE 1 Overall score (%)	2 Ease of set-up and use score (%)	3 Sound quality score (%)	4 Picture quality score (%)	5 Faulty disc handling score (%)	6 Standby energy use score (%)	FEATURES 7 Can play a region 1 DVD	8 Dynamic range control	8 PAL / pseud PAL output w NTSC DVD
PIONEER HTZ77DVD	78	64	83	96	90	90	✓	✓	– / ✓
AKAI DV-P221SS	72	70	70	100	90	5		✓	✓ / ✓
SONY MHC-S9D	68	55	69	96	80	90	✓	✓	– / ✓
LG DA-3530	66	58	62	84	90	70			– / ✓
SAMSUNG HT-DL100	66	56	60	96	90	70		✓	✓ / ✓

* *Of front left and right channels at 1 kHz, 10% THD.*

** *Dimensions are rounded up to the next 5 mm, all protruding parts except cables included.*

† *Prices are recommended retail, as provided by manufacturers in May or July 2002.*

(A) *See the profile on page 27.*

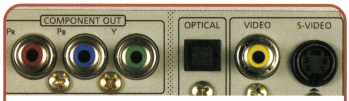
(B) *Can be added (see the profile, page 26).*

(C) *Claimed at 1% THD.*

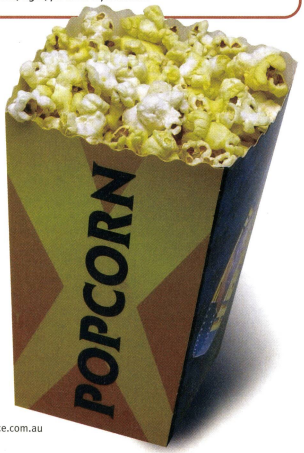
(D) *Reference frequency not stated, so this claimed output may not be directly comparable with the others.*

(E) *Dimensions for four components in a single stack.*

(F) *Sub-woofer unit and five speakers are made in Indonesia.*



Component video, composite video and S-video are all ways to connect your DVD to a TV or other display. See* Plain-English sound and video, *right, for more information.



PLAIN-ENGLISH SOUND AND VIDEO

Sub-woofer: A large speaker that produces low-frequency (bass) sounds. There are two types:

Active: Contains a separate amplifier that reduces the drain on the main amplifier and may allow for better clarity in the bass sounds.

Passive: Relies entirely on the main amplifier for power.

Dolby Digital 5.1 (also known as AC3): Has six separate digital channels (one for each of the five speakers and one for the sub-woofer); it's very common on newer DVDs.

DTS: Digital Theatre System is similar to Dolby Digital 5.1, but the signal is less compressed and may give better sound. It's growing in popularity.

Dolby Prologic: Comes in two flavours, four-channel and five-channel (called Pro Logic II). It provides sound from four or five speakers respectively, but the technology is not as refined as Dolby Digital 5.1 or DTS.

Composite video: A single cable (often with a yellow plastic insert, but not a normal RF aerial cable). This is the most common connection between a DVD and a TV.

S-video: A single four-pin cable that gives a better video signal than composite. However, you need an S-video output on your DVD and input on your TV, which not all have.

Component video: This is the best signal possible at present. It has three cables, each of which carries a different part of the signal, but it's not all that common yet. Newer TVs may have it.

Claimed power output per channel: The wattage tells you how loud the sound can get, but it doesn't tell you anything about its quality. One thing to check for this in the manual is the total harmonic distortion (THD) — the lower the percentage at a given wattage, the better (10% is generally regarded as OK).

		SPECIFICATIONS						
Full DTS playback capability	9 Component video output sockets	9 Sub-woofer included	9 Claimed power output per channel (watts)*	Main unit dimensions (H x W x D, mm)**	Warranty (years)	Origin	Manufacturer / distributor	Price ($)†
✓		Active	40	65 x 220 x 315	1	Malaysia **(F)**	Pioneer	1899
✓		Active	25	80 x 430 x 370	1	China	Prima	1199
✓		No **(B)**	120	480 x 280 x 350 **(E)**	1	Malaysia	Sony	1699
✓		Passive	30 **(C)**	85 x 360 x 405	1	China	LG	999
(A)	✓	Passive	40 **(D)**	80 x 350 x 335	1	China	Samsung	1299

Features to check for

All the tested models have these features unless otherwise noted here or in the table.

- Disc player that can play DVD video, CD audio, VCD (video CD), CD-R audio (recordable CD) and CD-RW audio (rewritable CD); all but the **SONY** can play MP3.
- Stereo sound.
- AM-FM radio receiver and antenna terminal.
- Front L/R speakers, centre speaker and rear L/R speakers.
- Sub-woofer (the **SONY** doesn't have one).
- Speaker output terminals for all speakers, including a socket for a sub-woofer even if one isn't included in the original configuration.
- Composite video output socket (single-cable TV hook-up; see *Plain-English sound and video*, left).
- S-video output socket to a TV.
- Headphones output socket at the front.
- At least one L/R audio input socket (to connect an external device such as a tape deck).
- Can decode Dolby Digital 5.1, DTS (the **SAMSUNG** will need a separate decoder — see the profile, page 27), Dolby Prologic and various other surround-sound modes (see *Plain-English sound and video*).
- Dynamic range controller for listening to dialogue with reduced background sounds (all except the **LG**) — so you don't annoy your neighbours when watching movies late at night.
- Test tone for checking or adjusting the volume level of each speaker (except the **AKAI** sub-woofer).
- Volume level control for each speaker (except the **AKAI**, which only lets you turn the sub-woofer on or off; and both the **SAMSUNG** and **SONY** have some speakers controlled together).
- Time delay or distance control for centre and rear speakers. The **PIONEER** and **SONY** also have this feature for the front speakers.
- 4:3 letterbox, 4:3 pan & scan and 16:9 wide-screen TV shape settings.
- Can play an NTSC DVD and produce a pseudo-PAL or NTSC TV-compatible output. The **AKAI** and **SAMSUNG** can also produce a PAL-compatible output, which would probably be better if you have an older TV.
- Skip to the start of the previous or next chapter/track (DVD and CD).
- One-touch skip to the start of the current chapter/track (DVD and CD). The **AKAI** and **SAMSUNG** can only do this with CDs.
- Fast view forward/reverse for DVD.
- Fast play forward/reverse for CD.
- Slow view forward/reverse for DVD (**SAMSUNG** forward only).
- Still/pause DVD and CD.
- Repeatedly play a DVD chapter or a CD track.
- Repeatedly play a DVD title or all tracks on a CD.
- Programmed play mode for DVD and CD (**AKAI** and **LG** only for CD).
- Resume play (DVD and CD) — start playing at the point where it was last stopped, as opposed to paused (except the **AKAI,** and the **PIONEER** for DVD only).
- Selectable camera angle, subtitle language and audio language.
- Parental control for setting the viewer permission level. The **PIONEER** also has a child lock, which makes the front panel keys inoperative.
- Sleep timer — the player goes to standby after a set time.

1 Overall score

The overall score was made up as follows:

- Ease of set-up and use: 40%
- Sound quality: 35%
- Picture quality: 10%
- Faulty disc handling: 10%
- Standby power: 5%

2 Ease of set-up and use

- Installing and setting up: 50%
- Remote control: 25%
- Onscreen display and indicators: 15%
- Front panel controls: 5%
- Front panel display and indicators: 5%

3 Sound quality

- Frequency response: 20%
- Listening to stereo sound: 40%
- Listening to surround sound: 40%

4 Picture quality

- Centring: 20%
- Brightness level: 20%
- Sharpness and detail: 20%
- Straightness of straight lines: 20%
- Colour purity: 20%

5 Faulty disc handling

- CD: 50%
- DVD: 50%

6 Standby energy use

The amount of power the system uses when it's plugged into the mains but not being used. High usage wastes electricity and your money — the **AKAI** is particularly poor, while the other models show this doesn't have to be the case.

7 Play a region 1 DVD

See *Before you buy*, page 27.

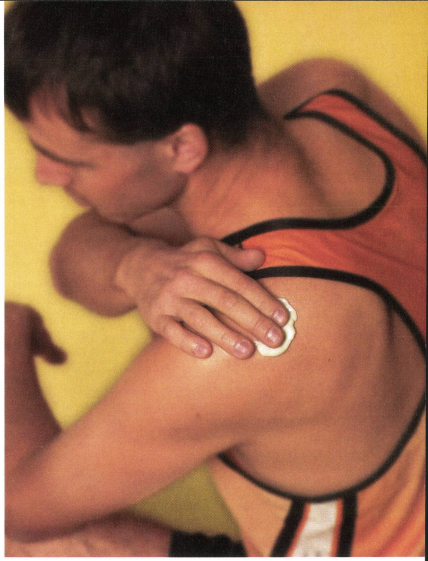
8 Features

See *Features to check for*, left.

9 Sound and video features

See *Plain-English sound and video*, far left.

Rub it better?



How effective are the various pain-relieving creams and lotions — and what's the best way to treat injuries?

IN A NUTSHELL

- **Some rub-on pain-relief** *products contain painkillers, while others rely on irritating the skin to create a hot or cold sensation, distracting you from the pain.*
- **There's some evidence** *that some types are better than nothing. But there are no studies that show one kind of pain-relief rub is better than another.*

Hard day in the garden? Tennis elbow playing up? Rubbing in a soothing liniment or cooling ointment can help ease the aches and pains away. But what about when your osteoarthritis flares up? Or when you sprain your ankle? Which — if any — can relieve pain and inflammation?

We looked at over-the-counter (OTC) products that claim to provide short-term or temporary relief of local pain and inflammation caused by sprains, strains, tendonitis, bursitis and sports injuries, as well as arthritis and rheumatism. They're called 'topical' pain relievers because you apply them to a particular part of your body.

These products are often classified into one of two groups — **non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs)** and **counter-irritants**. However, there are others that don't fit neatly into either category, including salicylates and capsaicin products.

NSAIDS

NSAIDs work by blocking the production of prostaglandins — hormone-like substances that trigger pain signals to the brain and bring on inflammation (redness, warmth and swelling). Topical NSAIDs generally contain the same active ingredients as oral versions, but in lower amounts. Different products contain different anti-inflammatories, with piroxicam, ketoprofen, diclofenac and benzydamine available in OTC topical forms.

The evidence

There's evidence that topical NSAIDs are better than a placebo treatment for reducing pain, but whether they're better than other (possibly cheaper) treatments, such as paracetamol tablets or counter-irritants (see right), hasn't been determined. Taking NSAIDs in tablet form (such as ibuprofen, diclofenac or neproxin) instead gives you a higher dose of the drug, and is therefore more likely to be effective — although the mechanical action of rubbing on the cream may also do some good.

Side effects

Topical NSAIDs can cause itching, eczema or rashes. Stop using the products immediately if you experience any of these side effects. Although less likely to occur, internal side effects from topical NSAIDs are similar to those of oral ones. They can include stomach upsets, headaches and dizziness, and even internal bleeding, asthma and kidney problems.

Avoid topical NSAIDs or use them sparingly if you've ever suffered from stomach ulcers (or similar gastrointestinal problems), kidney failure or asthma. Pregnant or breastfeeding women should avoid them and they're generally not suitable for children under 12. People over 65 are also more susceptible to side effects, so use the rubs with caution and report any side effects to your doctor or pharmacist.

Don't use both an oral and topical NSAID at the same time, as your body could receive more than the recommended dose, which increases the risk of side effects.

Products containing NSAIDs:

DICLAC, **DIFFLAM**, **FELDENE Gel**, **ORUDIS** and **VOLTAREN Emulgel**.

COUNTER-IRRITANTS

Counter-irritants produce a mild skin irritation, which causes a tingling sensation. This is thought to be soothing and to relieve the existing pain to an extent by diverting attention from it. Different products contain different ingredients, which provide either a warming or a cooling effect. Warming ingredients, such as nicotinates and some salicylates are meant to soothe general aches and pains, while cooling ingredients like menthol and camphor are recommended for minor sports injuries.

The evidence

There haven't been many studies on how effective counter-irritants are, but they've been used safely for decades and many people swear by them. While some of these products may produce a mildly soothing effect, at least some of their benefit probably comes from the placebo effect — just believing they work. Another explanation is that rubbing a product into the skin creates a warming effect, relaxes the muscles and perhaps disperses some of the natural chemicals that cause pain.

Side effects

Fewer side effects are thought to be associated with counter-irritants than with NSAIDs. Most are considered suitable for younger children, generally from the age of five or six, and normally for women who are pregnant or breast-feeding.

Products with higher concentrations of active ingredients include:

TIGER BALM Red; **GOANNA Heat Cream**; **DEEP HEAT Cream**, **Lotion** and **Sport** (spray).

(See also *Salicylates*, above right.)

Self-help

ACHING MUSCLES

Before you head for the medicine cabinet, a hot bath and a good massage promote blood flow and relaxation.

INJURIES

For minor sprains and strains, the acronym RICE (rest, ice, compression and elevation) is useful to remember:

- **Rest** the injured area until the pain subsides, particularly if it's in a weight-bearing joint.
- Wrap **ice**, ice packs, frozen peas or something similar in a cloth and apply it to the injury immediately after it occurs, and leave it there for at least 20 minutes to help minimise any swelling.
- **Compression** using an elastic bandage will help, but be careful not to restrict the blood flow completely.
- **Elevating** the injured area will help to minimise any swelling.

ARTHRITIS AND RHEUMATISM

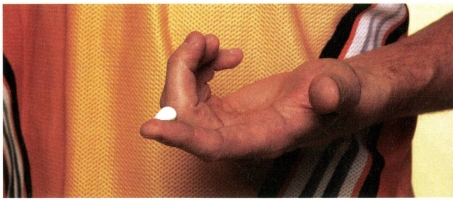
Rheumatism sufferers need to get a balance between rest and exercise. Special splints may help, especially at night, while physiotherapy and exercising in water can strengthen muscles and boost mobility. Losing weight, if appropriate, may reduce some of the pressure on affected joints.

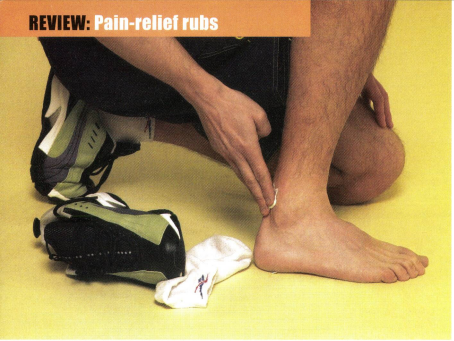
SALICYLATES

Salicylates, such as methyl, glycol and triethanolamine salicylate, are chemically similar to aspirin. Some act as counter-irritants (see left) and they may also have anti-inflammatory and painkilling effects much like aspirin tablets, but it's not clear whether the perception of reduced pain is due to this or the counter-irritation — or both.

The evidence

Unlike for the newer NSAIDs, there aren't very many published studies on the effectiveness of salicylates because they've been used for a long time and their effectiveness is more or less assumed.





Side effects

Salicylates can cause adverse reactions in people who are allergic to aspirin.

Products that contain a higher percentage of methyl salicylate include:

DEEP HEAT Arthritis and **Night Strength**; **DENCORUB Extra Strength Heat Gel**; **LINSAL Liniment**; **METSAL Cream** and **Heat Rub Gel**, **AR Heat Rub Cream** and **Liniment APF**.

CAPSAICIN

Capsaicin is what gives chillies their kick. Used over time, it appears to decrease or interfere with a nervous-system molecule called substance P, which helps send pain signals to the brain. It also acts as a counter-irritant, and is particularly recommended for arthritic joint pain.

Related to capsaicin is capsicum oleoresin, which is derived from capsicum powder, and while the oleoresin and powder both contain capsaicin, neither is as potent. Nonivamide is a synthetic form of capsaicin and has a similar action.

Safety

- **Test a small amount first.** Some people overreact to topical pain products, and may develop rashes and blisters. Don't apply any of these products to broken skin.
- **Keep out of reach of children.** Methyl salicylate and camphor are highly dangerous if swallowed, while capsaicin can cause fierce burning, especially in the eyes.
- **Don't use them with a heat pad.** First and second-degree burns can occur when you use one with counter-irritants or capsaicin. Many also recommend you don't use bandages either.
- If you're taking warfarin or other **anti-coagulant medication**, check with your doctor before using products containing salicylates or NSAIDs.
- **See your doctor** if pain is particularly intense or lasts for more than a week.

The evidence

With a number of studies showing its effectiveness, the benefits of capsaicin cream for osteoarthritis are widely accepted.

Side effects

About half of all people who try the cream experience a stinging or burning sensation — sometimes bad enough to stop treatment. However, this stops or diminishes over time (usually within a few days).

Products

ZOSTRIX contains 0.025% capsaicin and is recommended for osteoarthritis. (The stronger **ZOSTRIX H-P** is recommended for post-herpatic neuralgia and diabetic neuropathy.) **FINALGON Cream** contains nonivamide.

OTHER PRODUCTS

Emu oil

Manufacturers claim emu oil has anti-inflammatory properties, and there's some evidence of this, at least in animals. But lack of funding means there's little independent research going on, and therefore evidence in mainstream medical journals is lacking. Another problem for researchers and consumers alike is that brands vary in the quality, levels and types of active ingredient.

Glucosamine sulphate

Several studies have shown that certain glucosamine compounds, taken either alone or with chondroitin in tablet form, reduce the effects of osteoarthritis. **ARTHRO-AID Direct** is a topical cream that contains glucosamine sulphate and shark cartilage (which in turn contains chondroitin).

At the time of writing, there were no published trials on topical glucosamine. However, some early research shows promise.

THE VERDICT

Apart from capsaicin for osteoarthritis, there's no convincing evidence yet for choosing any one product over another. This is mainly because if they're tested, they tend to be tested against a placebo, rather than another medicated product. It also depends on the cause of the problem — treatments shown to be effective for tennis elbow might not help your sprained ankle. Even when compared with placebo products, the additional effect of the real products wasn't very big.

So if you think a topical pain reliever may help, choose one of the stronger products listed, and if it works for you, great!

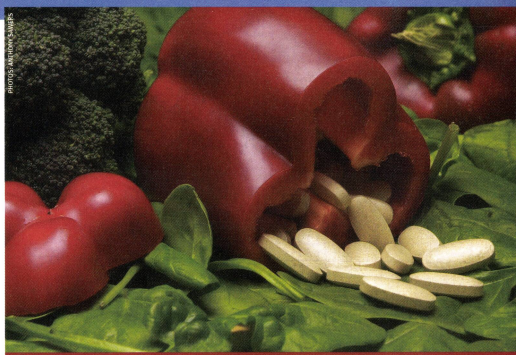
Get it right first time

A woman in the US has launched a lawsuit against a snack food company, claiming she suffered "mental anguish, outrage and indignation", when she found out that one of its products contained more fat than the label indicated.

The company claims a new machine had caused a discrepancy in nutrition information on the label of Pirates Booty, a cheese-flavoured snack: independent tests showed the product contained 147 calories and 8.5 g of fat (34%), not the 120 calories and 2.5 g of fat (9%) stated on the label.

While the mislabelled product was subsequently recalled, she'd like US$50 million compensation, claiming it's all about the principle of misleading labelling. She says she'd donate the money to charity should she win.

It'll certainly give food companies an incentive to lift their labelling game if she's successful.



MORE GOOD NEWS ON FRUIT AND VEG

There's further confirmation from two recent studies of the benefits of eating more fruit and vegetables.

The first study is an analysis of many previous research papers, each looking at the effect of antioxidant vitamins in food vs vitamin supplements and their protection against heart attack or stroke. Some of the studies analysed suggested both sources of antioxidants appeared to lower the risk, but controlled trials didn't confirm any significant effect from antioxidants in vitamin supplements, while observational studies have indicated a beneficial effect from the antioxidants eaten in fruit and veg.

The study concluded that in view of their many other benefits, it's reasonable to recommend a high and varied diet of fruits and vegetables as protection against cardiovascular disease, while antioxidant vitamins as supplements can't be recommended as a first line of prevention.

Another recent study by Oxford University found that vitamin supplements didn't produce significant reductions in the risk of heart attack, stroke or cancer.

GREEN TOMATOES FOR KIDS?

If you have children or grandchildren you may have seen **HEINZ EZ Squirt Blastin' Green Tomato Ketchup**. It's just good old tomato sauce, with — for some reason — added food colours to make it green.

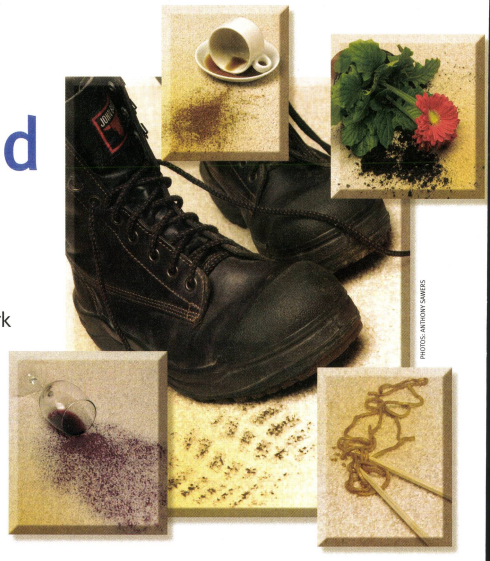
Most kids are more than happy to drown their food in traditional tomato sauce, which may be a handy way to get them to eat healthy food they'd otherwise turn up their noses at. We wonder why it's necessary to add the artificial colours 'brilliant blue' and tartrazine to a food purely as a marketing gimmick. There's disagreement about whether colourings cause problems such as hyperactivity in susceptible children. Without getting into that argument, why put unnecessary additives in a food kids eat happily enough without them?

YOU WERE ASKING

If you have a food or nutrition-related question you'd like us to answer, send it to Food Bites (see page 2 for how to contact us) or email it to foodbites@choice.com.au. We don't have the resources to respond to everyone personally, but we'll answer the most interesting questions on this page.

Out, damned spot!

Most of the 12 carpet stain removers didn't get the mark out, and some even damaged the carpet.



PHOTOS: ANTHONY SAWERS

IN A NUTSHELL

- **No product is best for all** *stains and carpets, but* Cleaners to consider, *far right, lists the top overall performers for your carpet type.*
- **Some of the cleaners** *damaged the carpet or changed its colour.*

On test

Twelve carpet spot stain removers, to see how well they clean up difficult stains — red wine, coffee, red cordial and shoe polish — on nylon and wool carpet. Following manufacturers' instructions, we treated the stains after one minute (as you probably would if you knew it had happened) and after 24 hours (such as when you only discover it the next day). The tables (page 36) give the results.

Does the spot you've cleaned show up lighter or darker than the rest of the carpet once it's been walked on again for a while? We checked. And we noted whether the cleaners themselves damaged the carpet or changed its colour (light beige in this case).

For video footage of our test, go to www.choice.com.au, type 'carpet spot stain removers' into the search box and click on the article.

Carpet stains happen every day. Some are minor and you can clean them up quite easily — general advice for dealing with a fresh, non oil-based stain on a wool carpet is first to try just clean water, followed by a wool fabric detergent if necessary. On a nylon carpet, many minor stains may just disappear as they soak down through the fibres and dry.

But sometimes the worst happens: a glass of red wine or a full cup of coffee all over the middle of your lounge room carpet, or the kids spill some cordial and you don't find it till next day. Will any of the stain-removal products on sale help you out? We tested them — both immediately after staining and a day later — to find out.

For stains, we picked shoe polish to represent an oil-based stain, and red cordial as a guide to how cleaners deal with a dye-based stain. Coffee and red wine are common household spills. These are all hard stains to remove, but that's why you'd turn to one of these cleaners — our test is pretty harsh, but we wanted to see if they could meet expectations.

THE RESULTS

Disappointingly, none of the cleaners was very good (57% was the top overall score on nylon carpet, and 51% on wool), and no one product is best on all types of stain. What's more, some will even damage your carpet. We've listed *Cleaners to consider*, right, for the best overall performers on each carpet type. You might think they're worth having on hand.

CLEANERS TO CONSIDER

No spot cleaner was much good on wool carpet, so don't expect too much even from these. On nylon some have slightly better results, but don't expect miracles. Prices are based on the lowest we paid in June 2002.

For nylon carpet

TRUE BLUE OUTRITE PLUS

Price: $5.90 / 1 L

- Good for cleaning cordial (particularly straightaway) and OK for shoe polish. Also OK for red wine and black coffee after leaving the stain for 24 hours, not so good immediately.
- Didn't damage carpet texture.

But...

- The treated area tends to get a bit darker than the surrounding carpet after resoiling.
- Damaged carpet pile slightly.

VERDICT

Can handle all four stains reasonably well after 24 hours and cordial straightaway.

SCOTCH-GARD SPOT CLEANER CARPETS RUGS & UPHOLSTERY

Price: $6.75 / 500 mL

- Not bad at cleaning oil-based stains like shoe polish immediately and after 24 hours; coffee and cordial after 24 hours.
- Didn't damage carpet texture.

But...

- Not much good on red wine.
- The treated spot tends to get slightly darker than the surrounding carpet after resoiling.
- Damaged carpet pile significantly when used after 24 hours.

VERDICT

Not bad for some stains, but not red wine. May damage carpet pile quite a bit if used after 24 hours.

ORANGE POWER CARPET & UPHOLSTERY SPOT CLEANER

Price: $4.49 / 750 mL

- Better on all four stains after 24 hours.
- Didn't damage carpet texture.

But...

- The treated spot becomes significantly darker than the surrounding carpet after resoiling.
- Damaged carpet pile slightly.

VERDICT

Gives reasonable to good results on all four stains if left overnight before cleaning.

For wool carpet

TRUE BLUE OUTRITE PLUS

Price: $5.90 / 1 L

- OK for cleaning shoe polish and red wine straightaway, and shoe polish after a day.
- Didn't damage carpet pile.

But...

- Gave pretty poor results for black coffee and red cordial and was even worse leaving the stains overnight. Didn't do well on red wine after this long either.
- The treated spot tends to repel dirt, so it looks slightly lighter than the surrounding carpet after resoiling.
- Damaged carpet texture slightly if used on a wet stain.

VERDICT

Worth trying on oil-based stains like shoe polish and on red wine straightaway, but it probably can't handle all your stains. Take care with wet stains.

For wool carpet

CAVALIER BREMWORTH CARPET STAIN REMOVER

Price: $5.82 / 400 mL

- Good for cleaning oil-based stains like shoe polish (and also coffee on nylon carpet).
- Didn't damage carpet texture or pile.

But...

- Gave pretty poor results for black coffee and was even worse for red cordial and red wine.
- Lightened our carpet slightly, so be sure to check first on yours (see *Side effects*, page 36).
- The treated spot tends to repel dirt, looking significantly lighter than the surrounding carpet after resoiling.

VERDICT

No damage to the carpet pile, but only really useful for oil-based stains.

CLEANING YOUR HOME

The CHOICE Book How to clean practically anything, *by Sydney Pemberton ($18.70), provides advice for every part of your home, including a removal guide for more than 70 common stains, a special carpet stain guide, recipes for cleaning products, advice about hiring a professional cleaner and an easy-to-follow cleaning calendar. To order a copy go to www.choice.com.au/shop or see page 38 of this issue.*

WHAT KIND OF CARPET?

If you want to get the best result the first time you use a stain remover you need to know what kind of carpet you have.

If you didn't have it laid yourself and can't find a label, cut a few loops of pile off somewhere inconspicuous, then light them with a match; nylon melts and forms globules; wool chars.

Our tests found it difficult to remove stains from wool carpet, so it's probably not ideal for houses with kids and cordial or messy pets. The wool loop carpet we used had a slightly ridged effect that seemed particularly difficult to clean — you might get a better result on other types of wool carpet. However, our results clearly show which cleaners are even worth trying on wool.

While it's commonly held to be best to treat stains straightaway, on nylon carpet our tests showed it's usually better to leave all but red wine stains to dry overnight. In most cases, it's best to treat stains on wool as quickly as possible.

BEST PRODUCT FOR EACH STAIN?

You might suspect you're more likely to spill coffee, say, than red cordial, and so think it worth keeping a cleaner on hand that copes well with a particular kind of stain on your type of carpet. Unfortunately, though, the results straightaway vs the following day are so inconsistent for most stains there are few sensible recommendations to make. The best results were:

- Removing coffee from nylon carpet after 24 hours: **CAVALIER BREMWORTH**.
- If you spill cordial on a nylon carpet, leave it for a day and then use **DE-SOLV-IT** or **DRY MAGIC** — both were very effective for this. Nothing gets cordial out of wool carpet very effectively either immediately or after a day: if you have kids, just don't have this kind of carpet.

Every other cleaner on each stain after both time intervals left some kind of noticeable mark — some slightly noticeable, some very — on the carpets. In many cases it may be an improvement on the original stain, but if you were expecting this kind of product to completely remove stains like these, you'd probably be disappointed.

SIDE EFFECTS

Our tests show there's likely to be some residual damage from the stain or even from the cleaning process itself. Consequences of cleaning can be:

- **Treated area looks different after resoiling:** The treated section may continue to repel dirt and so become lighter than the surrounding carpet — many of the stain removers had this effect on wool carpet. Alternatively, the treated bit could get dirty faster, as happened with all but **CAVALIER BREMWORTH** in our tests on nylon carpet. Professional cleaning may fix this problem.
- **Damage to pile:** Some products damaged the carpet pile, matting and/or fraying the treated part. **DRY MAGIC** was the worst on both kinds of carpet, as it stuck to the pile when the stain was wet and couldn't be removed even when dry. **WHITE WIZARD** also damaged the pile of both carpet types significantly if used on a wet stain.
- **Damage to texture: DRY MAGIC** also significantly altered the feel of the carpet if used on a wet stain.
- **Colour change:** Although changes to the colour of our light beige carpet weren't extreme, several of the cleaners lightened both carpet types. A light patch can be as obvious as a stain, particularly if your carpet is a dark shade. However, the products may react differently on different carpets. To be on the safe side, test any cleaner you buy on an inconspicuous patch of carpet. You might find out you've wasted your money on the cleaner, but that's better (and cheaper) than damaging your carpet. ■

NYLON CARPET RESULTS

Brand / model (in rank order)

TRUE BLUE Outrite Plus Carpet Cleaner
SCOTCH-GARD Spot Cleaner Carpets Rugs & Upholstery
ORANGE POWER Carpet & Upholstery Spot Cleaner
BIG KEV'S Stain Free
CAVALIER BREMWORTH Carpet Stain Remover
CHEM-DRY Stain Eliminator
DE-SOLV-IT Sticky Spot and Stain Remover
BRI TEX Professional Carpet Care Spotter
KARPET Stain Removing Powder
CHOICE Home-made soap cleaner **(A)**
DRY MAGIC Powder Carpet Cleaner
WHITE WIZARD Spot Remover and All Purpose Cleaner

WOOL CARPET RESULTS

Brand / model (in rank order)*

CAVALIER BREMWORTH Carpet Stain Remover
TRUE BLUE Outrite Plus Carpet Cleaner
DE-SOLV-IT Sticky Spot and Stain Remover
ORANGE POWER Carpet & Upholstery Spot Cleaner
SCOTCH-GARD Spot Cleaner Carpets Rugs & Upholstery
CHEM-DRY Stain Eliminator
BRI TEX Professional Carpet Care Spotter
CHOICE Home-made soap cleaner **(A)**
KARPET Stain Removing Powder
WHITE WIZARD Spot Remover and All Purpose Cleaner
DRY MAGIC Powder Carpet Cleaner

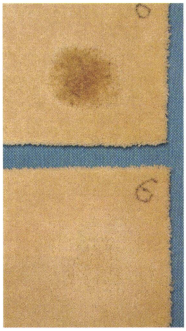
* *Big Kev's Stain Free isn't recommended for use on wool carpet.*

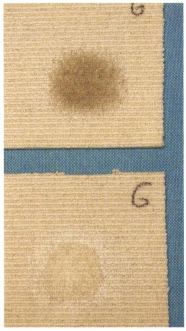
Tips for removing stains

- Get rid of as much of the stain as you can before applying stain remover — soak up liquids with clean cloths or paper towel and scrape up semi-solids or grease with a blunt knife or a spoon.
- To help prevent the stain spreading, try to work cleaning products in from its outside edge.
- Don't rub the carpet too hard as this may damage the pile and/or leave matted or tangled fibres — use a blotting or very light rubbing action.

1 Overall score (%)	2 Cleaning score (%, 1 minute)	2 Cleaning score (%, 24 hours)	3 Carpet damage score (%, 1 minute)	3 Carpet damage score (%, 24 hours)	4 Treated area after resoiling	5 Changed colour of carpet	Size	Origin	Manufacturer / distributor	Price ($)*
57	45	50	80	80	Slightly darker	No	1 L **(C)**	Australia	True Blue Chemicals	5.90
56	40	50	90	70	Slightly darker	No	500 mL	Australia	3M Australia	6.75
56	35	55	80	80	Significantly darker	No	750 mL	Australia	Orange Power	4.49
54	40	55	60	80	Significantly darker	No	500 mL	Australia	Big Kev's	1.65
53	na **(B)**	45	na **(B)**	70	No change	Slightly lighter	400 mL	NZ	Cavalier Bremworth	5.82
53	45	55	60	60	Slightly darker	No	474 mL	USA	P B Mitchell	6.96
53	40	55	60	70	Significantly darker	No	250 mL	Australia	RCR International	4.38
52	35	50	80	70	Significantly darker	No	500 mL	Australia	Reckitt & Colman	7.15
52	45	40	60	90	Slightly darker	Slightly lighter	500 g	Australia	The Carpet Maintenance Co	7.37
52	30	40	90	90	Significantly darker	No	na	na	na	na
42	20	60	0	90	Significantly darker	Slightly lighter	420 g	Australia	Bright Products	14.95
42	30	30	60	80	Slightly darker	Slightly lighter	283 g	USA	L B Roe Corporation	22.00

1 Overall score (%)	2 Cleaning score (%, 1 minute)	2 Cleaning score (%, 24 hours)	3 Carpet damage score (%, 1 minute)	3 Carpet damage score (%, 24 hours)	4 Treated area after resoiling	5 Changed colour of carpet
51	na **(B)**	30	na **(B)**	100	Significantly lighter	Slightly lighter
50	40	25	80	100	Slightly lighter	No
49	45	30	50	100	No change	No
46	35	20	80	100	No change	No
44	25	15	100	100	Slightly lighter	No
43	30	15	80	100	Slightly lighter	No
42	35	15	60	100	No change	No
40	35	20	80	60	Slightly lighter	Slightly darker
36	35	20	50	60	Significantly lighter	Slightly lighter
31	30	25	30	50	Slightly lighter	Slightly lighter
25	20	25	0	60	No change	Slightly lighter





The best and worst results for removing coffee from nylon (left) and wool (right). We only got results as good as Cavalier Bremworth on nylon (bottom left) from two other products (for cordial on nylon — see Best product for each stain?, *far left). The rest all left at least a slight stain or worse.*

* *Based on the lowest price we paid in June 2002.*

na *Not applicable.*

(A) *The recipe is from the CHOICE Book,* How to clean practically anything — *see page 35.*

(B) *Not applicable: instructions are to blot the stain immediately and treat it with water, then treat it with the product after 24 hours.*

(C) *Used diluted with water.*

1 Overall score

The overall scores for both wool and nylon carpets are made up of:

- Cleaning score: 70%
- Carpet damage score: 30%

2 Cleaning score

See *On test,* page 34, for details of stains and timing. We weighted each stain equally and averaged the one-minute and 24-hour results to give an overall cleaning score for each carpet type (except for **CAVALIER BREMWORTH**, whose score is only after 24 hours).

3 Carpet damage score

We assessed the texture and pile damage caused by stain removal and averaged the results (after one minute and 24 hours) to give each cleaner overall carpet damage scores for each carpet type.

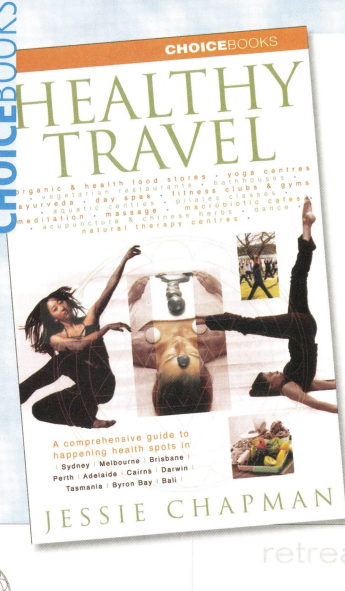
4 Treated area after resoiling

The treated section may continue to repel dirt and so become lighter than the surrounding carpet; alternatively, it could get dirty faster and look darker. See *Side effects,* far left, for more on this.

5 Changed colour of carpet

Some of the cleaners lightened the light beige carpets we used. See *Colour change,* far left, for more.

CHOICEBOOKS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HEALTHY TRAVEL

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At last! A comprehensive guide to healthy destinations throughout Australia (and Bali), including full contact details, prices, atmospheric tips and lists of services.

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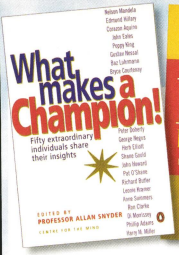
retreats
Australia and Bali offer some unique retreats in awesome settings. From complete relaxation to pure indulgence, some incorporate yoga, meditation, tai'chi, massage, spa treatments, personal development, walking and gentle exercise, while most include delicious food and a nurturing atmosphere.
Whether a secluded cabin in the bush, a yoga group in the mountains, a week of silence or simply a day alone, retreats are pure therapy for mind, body and soul. Retreating alone or with a group to focus inwards offers a refreshing break from the daily schedule, a chance to grow, evolve, overcome limiting lifestyle habits, learn positive mind—body techniques and discover your highest potential in life.
Often it's not until we stop that we realise how much our mind and body need to relax. Retreating allows for quality rest time, avoids prolonged stress levels, prevents illness and promotes a more balanced state of being.
2
ayurveda
Ayurveda, often referred to as 'the mother of medicines' with its science dating at the core of many medical sciences, has been widely practised throughout India for over 5,000 years. With ayus meaning 'life' and veda meaning science or knowledge, Ayurveda as the science of life or health, offers preventative and healing therapies along with various methods of purification and rejuvenation.
Incorporating diagnostic techniques, diet, yoga therapy, herbs, cleansing process, lifestyle and massage along with thousands of years of wisdom and expertise, Ayurveda offers a holistic approach to wellbeing with its philosophy empowering one to lead a life in tune with nature, life's cycles and one's higher self.
When visiting an Ayurvedic lifestyle consultant ones individual body type or dosha is determined along with personality type. The 'treatments' administered are designed to create balance within and optimum health.
14

new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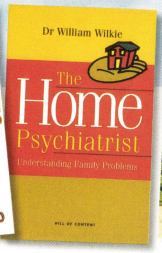

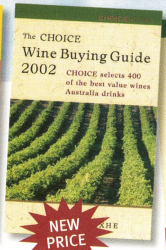

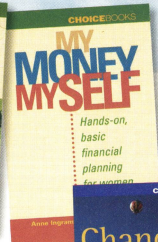

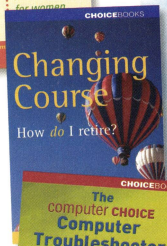

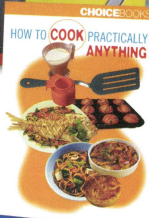

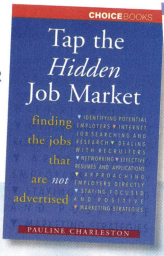

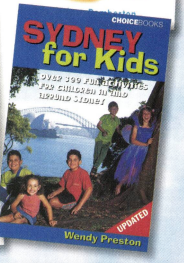

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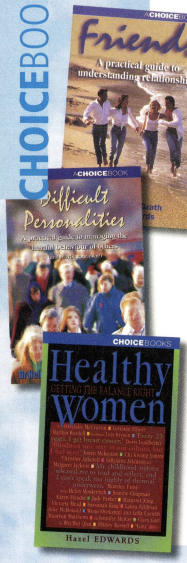
Meet ... Hazel Edwards

This month we'd like you to meet Hazel Edwards who, as the author of 144 books and plays for adults and children, is one of Australia's most prolific writers. When not writing she travels, and was the guest 'writer-on-ice' with the Australian National Antarctic Research Expedition in 2001.



If literature is 'high gossip' then 'stickybeaking' is my hobby. Actually, if you're a writer it's called research. But I'm genuinely interested in how women balance their lives, make and retain male and female friends, and cope with toxic personalities at home or at work. I like listening to the rueful or funny anecdotes that reveal how ordinary but extraordinary personalities cope with their difficult times, and what motivates them.

My CHOICE Book, *Healthy Women: getting the balance right*, was most satisfying to write. The interviews with Sally-Anne Atkinson, the ABC's Julie McCrossin (normally used to being the interviewer herself, of course), politician Lorraine Elliott and belly-dancing tutor Victoria Mead, along with 23 other women, enriched my life — belly dancing is now listed as my new hobby! The longest interview was with Antarctic station leader, Marilyn Boydell. Why? We were stuck on a supply ship on an icefloe after a helicopter crashed onboard.

The most challenging book I've written, *Difficult Personalities* (the most fun was *There's a Hippopotamus on Our Roof Eating Cake*), was with psychologist Dr Helen McGrath. As we researched for chapters on sociopaths, obsessive-compulsives and the anxiety-prone, I learnt a great deal about dealing with difficult personalities. And judging from the mass of letters and emails and response to my radio interviews, the book found a mark.

My next CHOICE Book? Next April you'll be seeing *Committee-itis* that I've co-authored with Jean Roberts. It's all about demystifying committee dynamics and procedures and, yes, dealing with even more difficult personalities!

Hazel's CHOICE Books are:

FRIENDS
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Washing machines

We've picked 14 top performers from our test of 33 — nine are Best Buys.

IN A NUTSHELL

- **Front loaders generally use less water** *and energy than top loaders, spin more effectively and are gentler on your clothes. The* What to buy *list has* Best Buys *for both.*
- **Most front loaders take longer** *than top loaders to wash a normal load, but nowadays there are some exceptions. See* When time is of the essence, *page 42.*
- **Our comprehensive guide** *shows* What to look for *(page 45) when choosing a new machine.*

WHAT TO BUY

Models listed here are the overall top performers in their size range and/or Best Buys. Best Buys are based on a low purchase price and running costs plus reasonable performance. A mix of front and top loaders is included for each size range.

UP TO 5.5 KG		
MIELE Novotronic W 828 (fr)		$1699
KLEENMAID BY BRANDT TX 768A (t/dr)		$2099
WHIRLPOOL AWM 5100 (fr)	TEST BUY	$1000
SIMPSON Enviro 100 45S100C (fr)	TEST BUY	$849
SIMPSON Esprit 550 36S550K (tp)	TEST BUY	$649
6–7 KG		
ASKO Quattro W6011 (fr)		$1649
ASKO Quattro W6221 (fr)		$1899
WESTINGHOUSE LF708B (fr)	TEST BUY	$999
HOOVER 600MB (tp)	TEST BUY	$679
7.5 KG PLUS		
MAYTAG Neptune MAH3000AAW (fr)*		$2749
SIMPSON Enduro 801 22S801K (tp)	TEST BUY	$949
SIMPSON Enduro 802 22S802K (tp)	TEST BUY	$1049
SIMPSON Encore 806 22S806K (tp)	TEST BUY	$949
SIMPSON Encore 807 22S807K (tp)	TEST BUY	$1049

fr front loader; t top loader; t/dr top loader with front-loader-style drum.

* *Top performer in this size range because of its comparatively high scores for gentleness and spin, water and energy efficiency, but it has the equal-lowest dirt removal score in the test.*

RHONDA TYMKIW

We've added the results for 12 new machines to those of models from previous tests that are still available.

Front loaders are again the overall top performers: while they and top loaders generally remove similar amounts of dirt, they tend to do it more gently, spin as well or better and cost you less to run.

They're also getting easier to use, with wider openings, such as on the two **BOSCH** models tested, and doors that open fully, as on the **MIELE Novotronic**. However, we've included a range of top as well as front loaders in our *What to buy* list, as many people still like a top loader for various reasons.

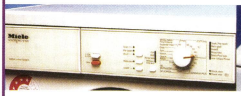
WHEN TIME IS OF THE ESSENCE

While cycle times used to be much longer on front loaders, now it's not a cert. For example, the front-loading **MAYTAG Neptune** is among the quickest of all machines, at just 46 minutes for a normal load. Some of the other front loaders have quick-wash options, generally designed for lightly soiled clothing and/or half loads — the **MIELE**, **BENDIX** and **ARISTON** have some of the fastest, with a cycle time of just 30 minutes.

PROFILES

Models in the *What to buy* list are profiled in rank order within size ranges. F

Up to 5.5 kg



MIELE NOVOTRONIC W 828

Front loader
Price: $1699

GOOD POINTS

- Quick-wash options for less heavily soiled loads.
- Wash temperature options range from cold to 95°C.
- Door can be opened during most wash cycles with only a minute's delay.
- Update facility allows service people to reprogram the controls as new technology becomes available.

BAD POINTS

- Small door opening, but the door opens fully (to 180°), making loading and unloading easier.

KLEENMAID BY BRANDT TX 768A

Top loader with front-loader-style drum.
Price: $2099

GOOD POINTS

- Wash temperature options range from cold to 90°C.
- Compact size is good for small homes.
- Castors enable it to be moved around.
- Five-year warranty and six-month money-back guarantee.

BAD POINTS

- No anti-crease feature.
- No quick-wash options.
- In our tests some of the powder detergent wasn't entirely flushed out. You may need to experiment to find suitable brands.
- The drum opening is small, and the spring-loaded lid needs care to avoid trapping fingers.

CHOICE best value SHOPPER

CHOICE SHOPPER

If you know the machine you want, CHOICE Shopper can find it at a good price, including delivery. Just phone 1300 360 655 with the model details, a price you want to beat and your eight-digit CHOICE subscriber number (it's on the mailing label with the magazine).

MARKS ON YOUR CLOTHES?

If you're getting black or grey marks on your washing it could be caused by 'scrud' (we like technical terms) — a waxy mixture of fabric softener and detergent — or by not using enough detergent for the amount of dirt in your clothes. To eliminate it:

- Wash the inside of your machine regularly with hot water and detergent (no clothes): fill the machine and let it soak overnight, then use a long wash cycle to flush it out. With top loaders, have a look inside the agitator if it has one — you may need to scrub it.
- If you wash in cold water, run a warm (or hot) wash every now and then to reduce the amount of build-up.
- Use fabric softener sparingly and don't spill it over the edges of the dispenser.
- Clean the dispensers regularly.
- Alternatively, you may not be using enough detergent and could try a little more.

commended retail, as supplied by manufacturers in June 2002. See the table for scores and more features.

WHIRLPOOL AWM 5100

Front loader
Price: $1000
BEST BUY
GOOD POINTS
- Has a quick-wash program plus a 'rapid' button to shorten the length of wash cycles.
- Wash temperature options range from cold to 95°C.

BAD POINTS
- Long 'normal' cycle time (133 minutes).

SIMPSON ENVIRO 100 45S100C

Front loader
Price: $849
BEST BUY
GOOD POINTS
- Reasonably fast 'normal' cycle time for a front loader.

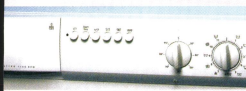
BAD POINTS
- No out-of-balance adjustment, but our tests have found front loaders tend not to have problems with this.
- The window in the door juts into the opening, restricting access a bit.

SIMPSON ESPRIT 550 36S550K

The only top loader tested in this size range.
Price: $649
BEST BUY
GOOD POINTS
- Faster cycle time for 'normal' wash than the front loaders in this size range.

BAD POINTS
- One of the least gentle models on clothes in the test.
- No out-of-balance adjustment or selectable spin speed.

6–7 kg



ASKO QUATTRO W6011

Price: $1649

ASKO QUATTRO W6221

Price: $1899
Front loaders
These are technically similar and so have the same scores; they may differ for some ease of use aspects, such as controls, and for some features.
GOOD POINTS
- Wash temperature options range from cold to 95°C.
- Quick-wash options for full and half loads.
- A good range of features (see the table).
- Comparatively large door opening.
- The W6221 has a higher maximum spin speed, so may have better spin efficiency.

BAD POINTS
- None to mention.

WESTINGHOUSE LF708B

Front loader
Price: $999
BEST BUY
GOOD POINTS
- The cheapest front loader in this size range, with low running costs for its size too.

BAD POINTS
- None to mention.

HOOVER 600MB

Top loader
Price: $679
BEST BUY
GOOD POINTS
- The cheapest to buy in this size range, with comparatively low running costs for a top loader of this size.
- Faster cycle time for 'normal' wash than the **ASKO**s and **WESTINGHOUSE**.

BAD POINTS
- One of the least gentle models on clothes in the test.
- No out-of-balance adjustment or selectable spin speed.

Profiles of 7.5 kg+ machines overleaf

PROFILES & THWAITE/ MARSHALL/A SAWERS

PROFILES

Models in the *What to buy* list are profiled in rank order. Prices are recommended retail, as supplied by manufacturers in June 2002. See the table for scores and more features.

7.5 kg plus

MAYTAG NEPTUNE MAH3000AAW

Front loader

Price: $2749

GOOD POINTS

- Particularly low running costs for a machine of this size.
- Shortest 'normal' program time for a front loader (46 minutes).
- The drum is slanted up towards the door to minimise bending when loading and unloading.
- The door (which has a large opening and can be reversed to open the other way) can be opened during a program with a two-minute delay.
- Five-year warranty.

BAD POINTS

- Equal lowest dirt removal in the test.
- Cleaning the detergent dispenser's tricky as it's only partially removable.

SIMPSON ENDURO 801 22S801K

Price: $949 BEST BUY

SIMPSON ENDURO 802 22S802K

Price: $1049

SIMPSON ENCORE 806 22S806K

Price: $949

SIMPSON ENCORE 807 22S807K

Price: $1049

Top loaders

These are technically similar and so have the same scores; they may differ for some ease of use aspects, such as controls, and for features — see the table for some.

GOOD POINTS

- Comparatively cheap to buy, with quite low running costs for machines of this size.

BAD POINTS

- The two Enduro models don't have selectable spin speed.

OUT OF BALANCE?

Even if your machine doesn't have an out-of-balance adjustment feature, you can reduce the likelihood of it getting out of balance and coming to a stop.

- Make sure it's level on the floor.
- Don't run a wash with just sheets or towels — put some smaller items in too. Load the larger items first and distribute washing evenly around the drum and/or agitator, to help prevent it piling up on one side.
- Experiment with the water level or use the load size sensor option if available, as the water level can influence balance — the more water, the more freely the washing moves about the drum.
- Try different load sizes and don't overload or underload your machine — it may not be able to cope if there's too much or too little.

How reliable have subscribers found them?

We asked subscribers if their washing machine had needed repair in the previous 12 months and whether they'd buy the same brand again.

The graphs show results for brands for which we received enough replies to report on (the number in brackets is the number of responses). Note that the results also cover brands not tested, and we don't have reliability data for all tested brands.

Overall, 16% of washing machines had needed repair, with front loaders slightly more likely to than top loaders. Differences of more than 7% are meaningful.

For people with a disability

With so many washing machines to choose from, quite a few of them are OK for people with a disability. So, when you're picking a machine — especially if you find one at a good price — check it has the following attributes:

- **If you're a wheelchair user:**
A front loader with a wide mouth and a door that opens to 180° is easier to load and unload and access while sitting, especially if it's mounted on a stand so you don't have to lean down.
- **If you're visually impaired:**
Look for controls with large, well-spaced letters and good contrast, and/or positive feedback such as beeps and/or lights when you press buttons.
- **If you have problems using your hands:**
Make sure the door's easy to open and the detergent dispenser's easy to remove, and look for large, raised dials with a crossbar, or buttons that are easy to press. Models with one-touch start and/or programming minimise the need to use your hands.

PERCENTAGE NOT NEEDING REPAIR	
Miele (396)	93
Maytag (332)	92
Kleenmaid (1317)	90
Hitachi (836)	88
Whirlpool (1341)	86
Westinghouse (366)	85
Asko Asea (698)	84
Simpson (3437)	84
Fisher & Paykel (6564)	83
Samsung (101)	82
Admiral (277)	81
Hoover (4341)	81
GE (371)	77
Bendix (610)	71
Thor (161)	71

PERCENTAGE WHO'D BUY THE SAME BRAND AGAIN	
Miele (402)	98
Fisher & Paykel (6626)	94
Asko Asea (706)	93
Maytag (337)	93
Hitachi (833)	92
Kleenmaid (1322)	91
Samsung (96)	88
Westinghouse (362)	88
Whirlpool (1357)	86
Hoover (4318)	85
Simpson (3436)	84
GE (362)	81
Bendix (609)	80
Admiral (259)	73
Thor (157)	72

FISHER & PAYKEL MACHINES

*As well as the 6 kg **GW611** machine reported on in the table, we also tested the 5.5 kg **GW511** and 7.5 kg **GW711**. Both gave very erratic wash results, which we reported to Fisher & Paykel. It's now looking again at these machines in the light of our test results, and we'll update you on their performance as soon as we can. If you have one of them and think it has a problem, contact Fisher & Paykel.*

What to look for

The table (page 44) has information on which models have most features and other aspects discussed below.

- Don't just go on claimed capacity — compare the space inside drums.
- If you're short of space you can put a dryer above a front loader (you may also be able to do this above a top loader with a fold-back lid, such as the **HITACHI** and **LG** models in this test).
- Most top loaders wash faster, though there are exceptions.
- Are the detergent and fabric softener compartments easy to use and removable for cleaning, and the lint filter easy to clean?
- You may need a special connector or sealing cap for the hot-water inlet if you want to connect to cold only.
- If you only have a cold-water tap or have a limited supply of hot water, a machine with a **heater** can be useful. Very few top loaders have a heater.
- If your water supply is limited, a front loader (or a top loader with the drum on its side) will use less than a conventional top loader. Automatic **load sensing** or reduced-load functions can help save water with smaller loads.

Some useful features

- **Favourite program:** You program your preferred wash option, which you can then select at the touch of a button (the **FISHER & PAYKEL GW611** in this test).
- Some machines have the option of using less water for rinsing, and a **water-save** feature allows you to reuse sudsy and/or rinse water.
- **Anti-crease:** A permanent press or creasables cycle is designed for easily creased fabrics. Some models do it by not draining the last rinse water or not spinning after the water is drained.
- **Out-of-balance adjustment:** Automatically detects and redistributes an out-of-balance load, either by spinning slowly before the full spin cycle or by taking in water.
- **Extra rinse:** Useful if you're sensitive to detergent.
- **Delay start:** Lets you take advantage of an off-peak water heater, for example.
- **Selectable spin speed:** You can change the set spin speed for a chosen program.
- **Trap filter:** Traps small objects so they can't damage the pump.
- **Child lock:** When set, programs can't be changed during a cycle.

Brand / model (in rank order within groups)	PERFORMANCE 1 Overall score (%)	2 Dirt removal score (%)	3 Gentleness score (%)	4 Spin efficiency score (%)	5 Energy efficiency score (%)	6 Water efficiency score (%)	6 Water used (L)	Cycle time (minutes, 'normal' wash)
Up to 5.5 kg								
MIELE Novotronic W 828 (fr)	80	80	76	81	89	76	61	115
KLEENMAID BY BRANDT TX 768A (t/dr)	75	70	74	75	89	77	58	112
WHIRLPOOL AWM 5100 (fr)	75	70	74	74	83	79	57	133
ARISTON Margherita 2000 AB95 (fr)	74	70	82	73	83	69	87	104
SIMPSON Enviro 100 455100C (fr)	74	72	70	73	83	72	77	87
SIMPSON Esprit 550 365550K (tp)	66	76	46	64	70	57	117	50
6 kg to 7 kg								
ASKO Quattro W6011 (fr)	79	77	74	77	88	79	63	108
ASKO Quattro W6221 (fr)	79	77	74	77	88	79	63	108
BENDIX Aquaria Splendida B1253X (fr)	79	78	74	81	83	79	73	132
BOSCH WFO2050AU (fr)	77	78	70	77	85	75	75	124
BOSCH WFO2430AU (fr) **(A)**	77	78	70	77	85	75	75	124
LG WD-8074FHB (fr)	75	72	74	68	91	77	82	115
WESTINGHOUSE LF708B (fr)	75	72	74	68	91	77	82	115
AEG Lavamat W830-W (fr)	72	66	66	70	90	76	72	120
FISHER & PAYKEL GW611 (tp)	68	75	50	81	71	53	154	42
HOOVER 600MB (tp)	68	78	44	65	74	60	120	50
SIMPSON Encore 605 365605K (tp)	67	77	40	67	75	59	122	53
WHIRLPOOL 6ALBR6245JQ (tp)	64	72	54	57	63	59	123	43
LG Turbo Drum WF-T653A (t/imp)	63	72	60	59	60	49	164	59
SAMSUNG Triflow SW65ASP (t/imp)	63	73	54	58	62	53	153	58
OMEGA Air Injection 8000 (t/imp)	63	79	52	41	68	45	191	81
7 kg or larger								
MAYTAG Neptune MAH3000AAW (fr)	70	61	74	71	87	73	109	46
SAMSUNG Triflow SW95ASP (t/imp)	68	75	60	61	73	59	192	64
HITACHI SF-H800PX (t/imp)	67	74	52	79	62	55	180	64
SIMPSON Enduro 801 22S801K (tp)	66	71	50	74	71	54	185	61
SIMPSON Enduro 802 22S802K (tp) **(B)**	66	71	50	74	71	54	185	61
SIMPSON Encore 806 22S806K (tp) **(B)**	66	71	50	74	71	54	185	61
SIMPSON Encore 807 22S807K (tp) **(B)**	66	71	50	74	71	54	185	61
LG Turbo Drum WF-T953A (t/imp)	66	70	56	67	70	60	180	61
PERFORMA BY MAYTAG PAV3200AAW (tp)	64	69	54	59	68	62 **(C)**	153 **(C)**	47
HOOVER 750LC (tp)	63	70	46	68	68	49	189	61
HOOVER 800RLC (tp)	63	65	50	72	69	53	186	62
SIMPSON Esprit 750 22S750K (tp)	61	61	52	75	68	48	194	62

(fr) *Front loader.*
(t/dr) *Top loader, front-loader-style drum.*
(tp) *Top loader with agitator.*
(t/imp) *Top loader with impeller.*
* *Includes energy used when switched off but not in use.*
** *Dimensions are for the smallest box that fits around the machine, allowing for inlet and drain hoses.*
† *Warranty conditions vary, so check with the manufacturer.*
‡ *Recommended retail price, as provided by the manufacturer in June 2002.*

(A) *Higher maximum spin speed than the WFO2050AU, so may give better spin efficiency.*
(B) *Technically similar to the Enduro 801, but with different features.*
(C) *Water drains at over twice the rate of most machines, so it may not be suitable if you have small or partially blocked drains.*
(D) *'Max extract' option removes more water during the spin cycle.*
(E) *Only for normal 'fuzzy' program.*
(F) *Supplied.*

See *What to look for, page 45*, for an explanation of features not listed here.

1 Overall score

Dirt removal makes up 40% of the overall score — gentleness and spin, water and energy efficiency are each 15%. All tests are on a 'normal' wash cycle.

2 Dirt removal score

We measured how much light was reflected from specially soiled swatches before and after washing. We used a spectrocolorimeter, which is more accurate than the human eye: differences of around 6% are visible.

3 Gentleness score

We attached swatches of easily frayed fabric to the garments in each load, measuring the area of swatch before and after the wash.

	FEATURES								SPECIFICATIONS						
ning ($ / ars)*	Heater	Delay start (hours)	Out-of-balance adjustment	Anti-crease	Selectable spin speed	Load sensor	Extra rinse	Water saver option	9 Cold only tap connection needed	Capacity (kg)	Dimensions (H x W x D, cm)**	Warranty (years)†	Origin	Manufacturer / distributor	Price ($)‡
	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			5.0	85 x 60 x 64	2	Germany	Miele	1699
	✓		✓		✓					5.0	90 x 40 x 60	5	France	Brandt / Kleenmaid	2099
	✓	0 to 9	✓	✓	✓				Y	5.5	85 x 60 x 58	2	Italy	Whirlpool	1000
	✓		✓	✓				✓	Y **(F)**	5.5	84 x 60 x 54	5	Italy	Ariston	1099
	✓			✓	✓				Y or cap	5.5	85 x 60 x 61	2	Slovenia	Electrolux	849
				✓					Cap	5.5	101 x 58 x 63	2	Australia	Electrolux	649
	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		6.0	85 x 60 x 63	2	Sweden	Asko Appliances	1649
	✓	5	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		6.0	85 x 60 x 63	2	Sweden	Asko Appliances	1899
	✓	1 to 12	✓	✓	✓	✓			Y	7.0	84 x 60 x 62	2	Italy	Bendix	1599
	✓	1 to 19	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		6.0	85 x 60 x 59	2	Germany	Bosch	2299
	✓	1 to 19	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		6.0	85 x 60 x 59	2	Germany	Bosch	2499
	✓		✓	✓	✓					7.0	84 x 60 x 64	2	Korea	LG	1249
	✓		✓	✓	✓					7.0	84 x 60 x 64	2	Korea	Electrolux	999
	✓		✓	✓	✓					6.0	85 x 69 x 61	3	Germany	Andi Co	1499
		1, 3, 9	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	Cap	6.5	102 x 60 x 62	2	Australia	Fisher & Paykel	1007
				✓					Cap	6.0	100 x 58 x 64	2	Australia	Electrolux	679
				✓	✓		✓		Cap	6.0	100 x 58 x 64	2	Australia	Electrolux	699
			✓				✓		Y	6.0	101 x 61 x 67	2	USA	Whirlpool	849
		3 to 48	✓	✓			✓			6.5	96 x 61 x 67	2	Korea	LG	879
		3 to 18		✓		✓	✓		Cap	6.5	101 x 69 x 71	1	Korea	Samsung	749
			✓	✓		**(E)**				7.0	103 x 61 x 69	2	Korea	Daewoo / Omega	1100
		1 to 8	✓	✓	**(D)**		✓		Cap	8.1	110 x 69 x 74	5	USA	Maytag	2749
		1 to 18		✓		✓	✓		Cap	9.5	106 x 66 x 76	2	Korea	Samsung	1099
		3 to 12	✓	✓		✓			Cap **(F)**	8.0	95 x 63 x 68	2	Japan	Hitachi	1349
			✓	✓					Cap	8.0	108 x 68 x 72	2	Australia	Electrolux	949
			✓	✓				✓	Cap	8.0	108 x 68 x 72	2	Australia	Electrolux	1049
			✓	✓	✓			✓	Cap	8.0	108 x 68 x 72	2	Australia	Electrolux	949
		1 to 23	✓	✓	✓			✓	Cap	8.0	108 x 68 x 72	2	Australia	Electrolux	1049
		3 to 48	✓	✓		**(E)**	✓			9.0	105 x 63 x 69	2	Korea	LG	1379
			✓	✓	✓				Cap	8.0	111 x 69 x 77	2	USA	Maytag	1349
			✓	✓				✓	Cap	7.5	104 x 68 x 72	2	Australia	Electrolux	849
			✓	✓					Cap	8.0	105 x 68 x 72	2	Australia	Electrolux	949
				✓					Cap	7.5	106 x 68 x 71	2	Australia	Electrolux	849

4 Spin efficiency score

We weighed clothes before and after washing to see how well the machine extracts water using the highest spin speed.

5 Energy efficiency score

This is calculated according to the kilowatt hours (kWh) of electricity used for each kilogram of washing.

6 Water efficiency score / water used

We calculated the amount of water used per kilogram of the test load of washing.

7 Noise

These are the maximum noise levels recorded during the spin cycle, measured 1 m away from the machine and 1 m above the ground. The noise level of these of these machines is around that of a normal conversation.

8 Running costs

This is an estimate of how much it'll cost you over 10 years for water and electricity if you wash the equivalent of one load every day using a 'normal' cycle, based on 12.5 cents per kWh for electricity and $1 per 1000 L for water, and including electricity used when the machine's switched on but not in use.

9 Cold only tap connection needed

If you want to use only cold water you may need a special Y-shaped connector or a sealing cap for the hot water inlet.

recalls&bans

Nowadays there are so many product recalls we may not be able to print all of them in CHOICE. For comprehensive recall information go to the Federal Treasury website: ***www.recalls.gov.au****. If you don't have web access, call the* ***Safety Policy Unit*** *on (02) 6263 2747.*

Companies often rent 1800 numbers for a couple of months after a recall is announced. If the number given is no longer operating, phone the manufacturer or retailer direct.

THE PRODUCT: Looksharp Concepts has recalled **toy cement trucks** (barcode 9316292084730), **Gallant Heroes bow and arrows** (barcode 9316292060983), and **Modern Fashion sunglasses** (barcode 9316292066619), sold in various discount stores before June 11, 2002, in NSW.
The problem: If dropped, the cement truck may release small parts that are a choking hazard; the bow and arrows and sunglasses are an eye hazard.
What to do: Don't use them. Return them to the place of purchase for a refund or call (02) 9688 1900.

THE PRODUCT: Austwide Wholesalers has recalled **Police Force jumbo play sets** (barcode 9316341190838), including plastic police guns, walkie-talkie, phone, knife and either ten 11 cm long orange plastic darts or four round balls, sold in various discount stores before June 20, 2002, in NSW.
The problem: Projectiles in the gun may pose an eye hazard, plus the firing noise may be too loud.
What to do: Don't use it. Take it away from children. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund or call (08) 9455 3200.

THE PRODUCT: Siltex Australia has recalled **Disappearing Cotsides** (patent no. 544268) — retractable mesh webbing attached to bed sides to prevent someone falling out — manufactured and sold from 1982 to 1998 (inclusive).
The problem: The flexible mesh may cause entrapment, contributing to suffocation.
What to do: Don't use it. Destroy and throw it away, or contact Siltex to have it destroyed. Call 1800 658 381 or email info@siltex.com.au to find out if you qualify for a refund (depending on how old it is).

THE PRODUCT: Go-Lo has recalled **glow-in-the-dark sea creature toys,** including sharks, stingrays and octopi (with Go-Lo code 625590, barcode 9316341147900), sold before June 6, 2002, in SA.
The problem: The toys expand when wet so pose a choking risk — they're banned in SA.
What to do: Return them to Go-Lo for a refund or call (02) 8796 6100.

THE PRODUCT: Philips Electronics Australia has recalled **Philips speaker power adaptors** sold with Hewlett-Packard desktop computers from October 2000 to April 2002 (inclusive). The adaptors were included in HP's P1534A external amplified speaker sets and have 'model no. HKA-12100ECD-230' or 'D12-1A-950' and 'made in China', on a black label in white writing.
The problem: The adaptor's power cord connector poses an electric shock hazard.
What to do: Disconnect the adaptor as follows:
- Switch off power to your PC and monitor (and any other peripherals).
- Unplug the adaptor wire plug from the speaker.
- Unplug the main power cable (connected to the T-junction plug) from the wall power socket and from the T-junction plug.
- Unplug the T-junction plug from the PC or monitor power socket.
- Keep the adaptor aside to return it to Philips.
- Plug the main power cable in and restart the computer.
- Call 1800 150 697 Monday–Friday, 10.30 am–7.30 pm (EST), or go to www.adapterrecall.com or www.hp.com and select 'Australia', to organise a replacement adaptor.

THE PRODUCT: Meriram has recalled **Sunsol Natural Fruity Muesli** (best before May 03, batch numbers 2142 and 2143) sold in 750 g yellow plastic packs before June 14, 2002, from Woolworths in Queensland.
The problem: It may contain peanuts and doesn't say so on the label.
What to do: Return it to the place of purchase for a refund or call 1800 625 658.

THE PRODUCT: The Warehouse Australia has recalled **the following toys,** sold in Clints Crazy Bargains, Clints Warehouse, Silly Solly's, Solly's Warehouse and The Warehouse stores from June 1, 2001, to June 18, 2002, in the ACT, NSW, Queensland and Victoria:
- 26-piece **alphabet learning puzzle** ($3.95).
- Nine-piece **foam picture puzzle mat** ($2).
- **Foam pop-out puzzles** in styracosaurus, stagbeetle, tarantula, bee and cricket designs ($7.95).
- **3D foam puzzle 2-pack** in elephant, seal, rooster, horse, kangaroo, lion, penguin and tiger designs ($7.95).
- **Whiteboard with foam numbers and letters** ($7.95).
- 14 x 20 cm **EVA stamps** in assorted designs, including sea life, animals, dogs, dinosaurs and vehicles ($2.50).
- **Assorted foam animal puzzles** in horse, seal, kangaroo and joey, penguin, elephant, tiger and bear designs ($1).
- **Noughts and crosses floor game** ($7.95).
- 23 cm **foam number puzzle** in numbers 0–9 (50 cents).
- 36-piece pack of **foam alphabet letters or numbers** ($3.95).
- Eight-piece **sea life wood puzzle** ($3.95).
- Soft, shiny, **multicoloured toy animals** ($2).
- 10 cm **terrycloth animals** in rabbit, monkey, pig, lion, elephant, cow, mouse, sheep, cat, bear and dog designs ($2).
- **Wooden puzzle maze scenes** depicting scenes of fish, a zoo, a farm, mixed animals and mixed objects ($3.95).

The problem: The toys either have small parts and so are a choking hazard, and/or don't have the correct safety warnings printed on them.
What to do: Take them away from children immediately. Return them to the place of purchase for a refund, call 1800 254 687 or email product.problem@thewarehouse.com.au.

THE PRODUCT: Housewares International has recalled **Arcosteel 500 mL stainless steel soup travellers** — model CZK-4050 (printed under the display box), 16.5 cm high, 8.5 cm in diameter, with 'Arcosteel Stainless Steel' embossed on the base, sold from February to June 20, 2002.
The problem: The lid may come off unexpectedly, which may cause injury.
What to do: Don't use it. Call 1800 680 340 for how to return it and get a refund.

THE PRODUCT: Peugeot has recalled **206 Multiplex model vehicles** — model years October 2001 to June 2002.
The problem: A possibly misaligned steering column shroud could cause the ignition switch to lock in the start position.
What to do: Contact your Peugeot dealer.

THE PRODUCT: Toyota has recalled **Daihatsu Delta vehicles** made from November 1, 2001, to April 11, 2002, with VIN ranges ending in 00063302 to 00063739.
The problem: Possible unexpected driveline vibration and eventual separation of the rear axle from the vehicle.
What to do: Contact your Toyota dealer.

THE PRODUCT: Toyota has recalled **Lexus LX740** and **Landcruiser 100/105 Series 4WD vehicles** made from January 7, 1998, to September 2, 2001, and **HiLux 4WD vehicles** made from July 29, 1997, to December 2, 2001.
The problem: The spare wheel could fall off under rough conditions.
What to do: Contact your Toyota dealer.

THE PRODUCT: Holden has recalled **Zafira vehicles** — model 02-H-03 TT.
The problem: A bracket is missing from the driver's seat base.
What to do: Contact your Holden dealer.

THE PRODUCT: Nissan has recalled **A33 Maxima vehicles,** made from June 2001 to January 2002 (inclusive), with VIN ranges from JN1CCUA33A 0093507 to 0102090.
The problem: Possibility of impaired steering control.
What to do: Contact any Nissan dealer.

Listen in to what the health experts say

CHOICE *Health Reader* provides you with the latest on nutrition, cancer prevention and treatments, exercise, heart disease, alternative treatments, medicine and much more. It's written by Dr Norman Swan, award-winning medical journalist and ABC broadcaster, and Dr Garry Egger, one of Australia's best known health educators.

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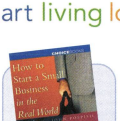
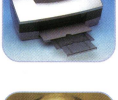


Starting a business

The CHOICE Book *How to Start a Small Business in the Real World*, by John Pospisil, has all the info you need, from investigating a business plan's viability to carrying it through. See a free extract at www.choice.com.au/money.

Inkjet printers test

Check out our test of 20 inkjet printers — just go to www.choice.com.au and type 'inkjet printers 2002' in the search box.



ACCC under attack

We're challenging the big-business attempt to muzzle the ACCC. Add your voice to ours — send an email of protest. Just type 'trade practices review' into the search box.

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The website has more information than even CHOICE itself — items that lend themselves better to the web medium than to print, and some that are simply extra content. To whet your interest, here are some picks from www.choice.com.au.

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* indicates an update of a previous report, additions or corrections to reports, small follow-up items or letters. For space reasons, the index generally doesn't include Choice Cuts, many other small pieces, and recalls and bans.

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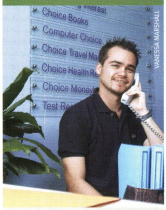

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Fat heads

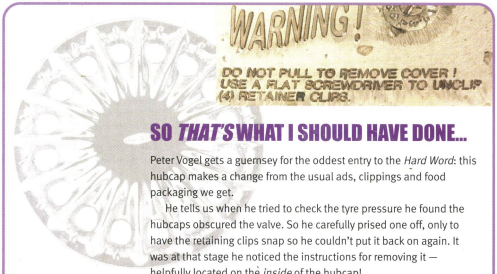
Need to lose weight fast? You could try Dietary Fat Blaster — apparently so effective that "anything more powerful would be illegal".

But oh dear, what's this near it? *New Super Strength Max* Dietary Fat Blaster. The name certainly suggests it's more powerful than the old regular-strength product. But wouldn't that make it ... ahem, illegal?

Rinnai
Rewarding Relationships
GAS HEATERS
NOW at RETRAVISION

For stoking the gas control knob?

OK, so it sets the scene for warm and cosy, but really — fire tools for a gas heater?



SO *THAT'S* WHAT I SHOULD HAVE DONE...

Peter Vogel gets a guernsey for the oddest entry to the *Hard Word*: this hubcap makes a change from the usual ads, clippings and food packaging we get.

He tells us when he tried to check the tyre pressure he found the hubcaps obscured the valve. So he carefully prised one off, only to have the retaining clips snap so he couldn't put it back on again. It was at that stage he noticed the instructions for removing it — helpfully located on the *inside* of the hubcap!

WOODEN CLOTHES AIRER
469861
$29.95
Towel not included

INVISIBLE TOWELS FOR A CLUTTER-FREE BATHROOM?

Oops! Looks like the photographer forgot to include the towel that's not included.

A cock-and-bull story

Eggs laid by roosters?

HOW ABOUT A LITTLE HELP?

The Hard Word would like to thank all the readers who've responded with examples of outrageous ads, promotions and products. Thanks to P Vogel, B and J Horton, D Main, R Hunter, D Wakelin and M Rutland for their contributions to this month's *Hard Word*. Please keep sending them in.

If you have any examples you think deserve to be on this page, send them to *The Hard Word*, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204, or email your suggestions to thehardword@choice.com.au.